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John Brown, Slavery, and the Legacies of Revolutionary Violence in Our Own Time: A Conference Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Harpers Ferry Raid

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John Brown Embodied: An Afterlife in American Visual Culture

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Available online at <http://www.yale.edu/glc/john-brown/shaw-abstract.pdf>
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Abstract

The moment before John Brown's execution, in which the radical abolitionist is led in fetters to the gallows, is a ubiquitous scene within nineteenth-century American painting and print media. In such images Brown is depicted either affectionately regarding or actually stooping to kiss a brown-skinned child that is being offered up to the martyr by its much darker mother. It is an important cultural fantasy that was assembled from a diverse array of sources including newspaper accounts, poetic descriptions, and adaptations of printed photographs and then widely distributed during the Reconstruction period. As such it visualizes the personal and social anxieties of the artists who created it and the audiences that consumed it, constituencies that were formed during the lead up to the Civil War, the conflagration itself and the tumultuous period that followed. This presentation explores the natal origins and subsequent

legacy of this iconic image by teasing out the latent traces of interracial intimacy that are contained within it by focusing on one of its first painted manifestations, *John Brown's Blessing* (1867, New-York Historical Society) by the Kentucky-born Thomas Satterwhite Noble.