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# John Brown, Black History, and Black Childhood: Contextualizing Lorenz Graham's John Brown Books

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**Abstract:** Lorenz Graham wrote two children's books about the (in)famous abolitionist, John Brown—a picture book, *John Brown's Raid: A Picture History of the Attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia* (1972) and a biography for young adults, *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom* (1980). Both books recount a history of Brown's life and antislavery work, situated within Brown's African American context and recounted from a Black perspective. While Graham's books are exceptional in their extended treatment of this historic figure for a child audience, they are not unprecedented. This essay situates Graham's children's biographies of Brown in the long history of Black writers' work on him—for both adults and children. Reading Graham's John Brown in this context shows how Graham follows familiar traditions for encountering Brown within the larger context of Black freedom struggles. Graham's books follow a rich tradition of presenting him to Black children.

**Keywords:** John Brown; Lorenz Graham; African American; children's literature; 19th-century; Black children

## 1. Introduction

Lorenz Graham's historical children's books about John Brown follow a distinctly Black literary tradition. Inasmuch as African American children's literature has broadened the perspectives presented to child readers, it has been an essential site for education. History-centered literature (in a variety of nonfiction and fiction genres, from biographies to historical fiction) have remained prominent in African American children's literary history, no doubt because Black authors have borne the primary responsibility for conveying Black history to Black children. At times, African American children's authors have also reframed white histories. Graham wrote two children's books about the radical white abolitionist: a picture book, *John Brown's Raid: A Picture History of the Attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia* (1972) and a biography for middle-grade or young adult readers, *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom* (1980). Both books recount a history of Brown's life and antislavery work, situated within Brown's African American context and recounted from various Black perspectives. (I use both the terms "African American" and "Black" throughout this essay, to refer to U.S. people of African descent, in keeping with the two most prominent terms for this racial group that are still in popular use).

John Brown's radical abolitionism culminated in an 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia, meant to prompt an insurrection that would bring about the end of slavery. Brown was convicted of murder, treason against the state and conspiring with the enslaved to rebel, and hanged before the year's end. Beginning in 1859, the story of John Brown would be told and retold, from perspectives that variously paint him as a fanatic, a madman, and a terrorist—or, alternatively, as a martyr, a prophet, and a saint. Brown's story has also been told throughout African American literary history, from the self-published memoir of Osborne Perry Anderson (the only Black man to escape the Harper's Ferry raid with his life) to W. E. B. Du Bois' ([1909] 2001) biography of the abolitionist.<sup>1</sup> Brown has been the subject of writing across various genres, including poetry, short fiction, historical accounts of the Harper's Ferry raid and its aftermath in the early Black press, and children's literature.



**Citation:** Fielder, Brigitte. 2022. John Brown, Black History, and Black Childhood: Contextualizing Lorenz Graham's John Brown Books. *Humanities* 11: 124. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h11050124>

Received: 25 May 2022

Accepted: 16 August 2022

Published: 3 October 2022

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While Graham's books are exceptional in their extended treatment of this historic figure for a child audience, they are not unprecedented. This essay situates Graham's children's biographies of Brown in the long history of Black writers' work on him—for both adults and children. Reading Graham's *John Brown* in this context shows how Graham follows familiar traditions for encountering Brown within the larger context of Black freedom struggles. As Graham traces Brown's history and attends to his legacy, he carries forward a tradition of Black reporting, remembrance, and evaluation of the controversial white figure, a figure who is better understood by taking Black perspectives into account. Understanding Graham's *John Brown* books within this tradition, we can better understand what they offer beyond an account of this prominent figure. My discussion of these still under-studied children's books illustrates the context for and stakes of presenting Black children with histories that are informed by Black perspectives, sources, and methodologies.

In order to contextualize Graham's picture book and biography about John Brown, I trace Brown's relationship to Black children (in both history and myth) and Black representations of Brown, particularly in early African American children's literature. Graham's late twentieth-century children's books about John Brown belong to a Black literary and intellectual history dating back to the aftermath of his execution and continuing throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This intellectual and artistic tradition allows us to understand Graham's *John Brown* books, however radical one might take them to be, within the continuities of African American writing and education about a man who was arguably the most controversial of white abolitionists.

## 2. John Brown, Black History, and Black Children

John Brown has always been a figure of interest in Black history. Black interpreters of Brown have taken a more expansive approach than most white accounts, situating him beyond exclusively white contexts for antislavery and other antiracist activism. Elsewhere I have discussed popular attention to Brown via the racialization of both madness and violence, which shows how African American writers have discussed him in relation to—and at times even placed him within—Black antislavery discourse and activism, especially within critiques of white moderacy.<sup>2</sup> White characterizations of Brown as “mad” and those that assess his violence as unjustified have overwhelmingly failed to situate him alongside Black antislavery sentiment and defined violence as justifiable only when it tends toward white supremacist ends. Alongside such representations, we can also observe a parallel history of Black attention that diverges sharply from such assessments. Brown has been represented more legibly by Black writers who have discussed him with a fullness of attention that evades caricatured representations of him as either an irrational, fanatical madman or a saintly savior. These readings of Brown make him legible because they situate him within African American histories of abolitionism, rather than exclusively white ones.

Scholars have noted Brown's relationship not only to white abolitionism, but also to Black history. Benjamin Quarles discusses Brown's “Black orientation” at length, noting Brown's relationships with Black people.<sup>3</sup> Manisha Sinha compares Brown's Kansas militia, the Liberty Guard, to Black militias that were formed before the start of the Civil War.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, Kellie Carter Jackson notes the importance of recognizing Brown's place in the movement of Black antislavery strategists.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Brown is not only the purview of recent scholarship in African American history. Dating back to Brown's own lifetime, prominent Black leaders described his radical abolitionism as stemming from his relationships to Black people. For example, in an 1848 issue of his antislavery newspaper *The North Star*, Frederick Douglass writes that “Though a white gentleman, [Brown] is in sympathy a black man, and as deeply interested in our cause, as though his own soul had been pierced with the iron of slavery.”<sup>6</sup> In his 1909 biography of Brown, W. E. B. Du Bois describes him as “the man who of all Americans has perhaps come nearest to touching the real souls of black folk.”<sup>7</sup> For Black writers, it was significant to find an example of a white abolitionist who was in collaborative relationship with Black people themselves, and therefore stood out from the spectrum of white abolitionists that skewed heavily moderate and paternalist.

Black people have encountered Brown and interpreted his legacy not only through his culminating act of violent radical abolitionism, but have also contextualized the events of Harper's Ferry within his larger relationships to Black people.

Brown's relationships with Black people also included Black children. Unsurprisingly, this began during Brown's own childhood. Nineteenth-century white abolitionists notably understood childhood as a key period for developing antislavery sentiment. Although some white abolitionists recounted a "conversion" of sorts to antislavery views in adulthood, others described abolition as part of their childhood development and tied to historical, religious, or moral education. By the antebellum period, antislavery children's literature explicitly addressed white children in order to shape their ideas about racial difference (and sometimes even racial equality), to inform them about histories of the transatlantic slave trade and the current state of slavery in the United States and elsewhere, and to recruit them to actively participate in the antislavery cause. The last of these goals, prompting white children's involvement in abolition ranged from more passive calls for them to "feel right" on the subject, to more pragmatic ones, from product boycotts, advocacy with adults, and (future) political participation, to more radical ones suggesting they might even participate in illegal activities such as harboring fugitives. However, not all white children's views on slavery were formed via literary instruction. For Brown, an early lesson about slavery involved an encounter with an enslaved boy.

During the War of 1812, Brown assisted in his father's cattle-driving work and sometimes traveled alone, even though he was then only a child. During one such trip, when he was only twelve years old, he lodged with an enslaver family who held a boy Brown's own age captive.<sup>8</sup> Although this family treated young Brown well, their neglect and abuse of this other child left a lasting impression. Brown saw that, deprived of his parents, this enslaved child had no adult advocates. Unlike most white children of the time, Brown had not been raised to think himself more deserving of good treatment than Black children. He knew this treatment was unfair. Biographers cite this encounter as formative in sparking of Brown's radical abolitionism. Significantly, however, this formative encounter was not just an event in Brown's own childhood, but one of witnessing enslaved childhood.

In his discussion of Brown's "Black orientation", Benjamin Quarles describes this event as "the most important disclosure" in Brown's autobiographical account.<sup>9</sup> Although Quarles goes on to query whether this account was one of "total recall" by an "unusually thoughtful youngster" or a sentimental expression of "wishful reconstruction", countless scholars of childhood across fields have shown how youth becomes a key site for creating formative ideas about race and racism. Brown's later relationships with Black people were likely heavily influenced by early encounters like this one.

Brown's interest in Black children extended beyond this scene from his own childhood. Osborne Perry Anderson, the sole Black man to escape Harper's Ferry, gives an account of Brown's interest in and care for a Black newborn in his narrative, *A Voice from Harper's Ferry* (1861). During earlier events in which Brown helped to free a group of enslaved people from Missouri who ultimately escaped to Canada, an emancipated woman gave birth on the journey. Anderson recounts the care that Brown and his army paid the mother and child, writing that "not one jot of comfort or attention for the tender babe and its invalid mother was abated".<sup>10</sup> While this may seem at first glance the most obvious course of action, white care for Black children was not a given in this antebellum moment, even among abolitionists. This child was apparently named "John Brown", at the elder John Brown's urging. Though a gesture of seeming self-importance, it also signals whom Brown included among those he intended to carry on his legacy.

Anderson's attention to this moment also seems fitting in his shaping of Brown's legacy for the public and future generations. Moreover, his representation of Brown names Black children explicitly within his interests. As he describes,

John Brown, the liberator of Kansas, the projector and commander of the Harper's Ferry expedition, saw in the most degraded slave a man and a brother, whose appeal for his God-ordained rights no one should disregard; in the toddling

slave child, a captive whose release is as imperative, and whose prerogative is as weighty, as the most famous in the land.<sup>11</sup>

Here Anderson includes the familiar abolitionist rhetoric of the enslaved as a “man and a brother” to Brown while making childhood visible as well. The presence of enslaved Black children within Brown’s biography and Black histories of him is notable in a larger context in which enslaved children were often rendered invisible. Historian Wilma King writes that, despite being a significant percentage of the enslaved population in the US, children “have received little attention [from historians] because they, more than other enslaved persons, were ‘silent and invisible’”.<sup>12</sup> Increased attention to both free and enslaved Black children of the nineteenth century appears in recent work by scholars including Crystal Webster, Nazera Wright, Robin Bernstein, Sarah Chinn, Kate Capshaw, Anna Mae Duane, Karen Woods Weierman and myself. Nevertheless, Black children and Black childhood in the antebellum era still remain underexamined.

Attending to how the lives of actual enslaved children matter for comprehending Brown complicates how Black children have been more often discussed, in largely sentimental ways in which they are oddly abstracted and removed from his biography or the future of young Black readers who would receive his story. Nevertheless, considering these moments of attention to Black children in Brown’s biography and memorialization, it seems fitting that Brown sometimes appears in popular (though mythologized) imagery alongside a Black child.

Those familiar with Brown in popular culture may recall the image of the condemned man stopping to kiss a Black baby, lifted up by their mother, on his way to the scaffold.<sup>13</sup> This likely apocryphal incident in Brown’s life was recounted in popular newspapers such as the *New York Daily Tribune*, paintings by artists including Louis Ransom and Thomas Satterwhite Noble, and poetry by Lydia Maria Child and John Greenleaf Whittier, the latter of whom describes the “poor slave-mother with her little child pressed nigh”.<sup>14</sup> Thomas Hovenden’s 1884 *The Last Moments of John Brown*, for example, represents Black people among those gathered outside the prison on his execution day (Figure 1: Hovenden’s *Last Moments of John Brown* Engraving).

On the right side of the image, Hovenden depicts a Black woman holding her child over the railing as Brown descends the stairs, to embrace him. While the veracity of this incident in Brown’s biography is heavily contested, the persistence and repetition of this story in the popular imaginary shows how Brown was imagined to be connected to Black childhood. Moreover, as will become clear, this image of Brown embraced by a Black child might be taken not simply as a sentimental, apocryphal scene within his biography but a metaphor for the ways Brown’s life would be presented within Black history for future generations, including for Black children.

Black people also participated in circulating the apocryphal image of Brown kissing a Black baby. Depictions of the incident circulated in the Black Press following Brown’s death in such stories as “The Execution of John Brown” in the December 1859 *Anglo-African Magazine*.<sup>15</sup> The story recounts Brown’s characteristic “calmness and serenity” as he approached the scaffold and encountered “a black woman, with her little child in arms” and “stopped for a moment in his course, stooped over, and with the tenderness of one whose love is as broad as the brotherhood of man, kissed the child affectionately”.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of whether this moment actually happened in the lead up to Brown’s execution, I am interested in the cultural—we might even say literary—quality of this story. As this story works its way into the popular imagination, we see the immediacy with which Brown becomes a figure offered to Black children.



**Figure 1.** Thomas Hovenden, Etcher, and George Gebbie. *The last moments of John Brown leaving the jail on the morning of his execution*/Hovenden N.A., Painter & Etcher, ca. 1885. Philadelphia: Geo. Gebbie publisher, August 12. Photograph. Courtesy, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012648890/> (accessed on 5 May 2022).

Brown himself wanted to be mourned and remembered by Black children. In an 1859 letter sent from prison as he awaited his execution, Brown wrote to Mrs. George L. Stearns that he wanted no hypocritical religious mourners at his public murder, but asked “that my only *religious attendants* be poor, little, dirty, ragged, bare headed & barefooted *Slave boys & Girls*; led by some old *grey headed Slave Mother*”.<sup>17</sup> Whittier’s poem couples the mythologized scene mentioned above with the hope Brown expressed to Stearns in this letter, describing Brown’s kiss alongside this dying wish for those he deemed would be his most appropriate mourners. In Whittier’s poem, Brown declares,

I will not have to shrieve my soul a priest in Slavery’s pay  
 But let some poor slave-mother whom I have striven to free,  
 With her children, from the gallows-stair put up a prayer for me.<sup>18</sup>

It is difficult to separate Brown's mythologization from his own crafting of his image. Nevertheless, one wonders whether, in this late thought about enslaved child mourners, Brown might have considered the enslaved children he did encounter during his life. Brown may well have remembered the child who bore his name, born en route to freedom in Canada, or the enslaved boy who (if still living) would have then been a man Brown's age. Within this context of considering Brown's relationships to Black children, we must also consider Black children as later recipients of Brown's story.

### 3. Brown in Early African American Children's Literature

Just as John Brown's biography intersects with accounts and representations of Black children, he is also represented in children's literature. Lydia Maria Child's poem about Brown (called "The Heroes Heart" when published in the *Liberator*) would be retitled "John Brown and the Colored Child" when it was reprinted in the *Freedmen's Book* in 1860.<sup>19</sup> For Child, as for other white abolitionists, this moment presented what was likely a more palatable image than an account of Brown's violence. The *Freedmen's Book* was intended for recently emancipated Black communities (assumedly for people of all ages and regardless of literacy status) and included short pieces of prose and poetry by both white and Black authors.<sup>20</sup> Several texts include discussions of children and childhood. Readers (or auditors) would have encountered this poem about John Brown alongside other writing about Black children, such as Child's brief biography of Phillis Wheatley, Wheatley's own "The Words of Providence" (which indicates that the poem was "written at sixteen years of age"), Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's poem "Thank God for Little Children", and Jourdon Anderson's "Letter from a Freedman" in which he discusses his own children's education. Even as white abolitionists used this story about Brown to counter more popular images of him as violent and insane, the story circulated within a broader context of care about Black children and even writing for them.

This image of Brown cannot be entirely divorced from the violence of his biography, however. While this may initially seem an impediment to presenting this history to children, we must also recognize what forms of violence remain celebrated in children's literature. Although violence is sometimes a contentious topic for children's literature, national accounts of war are often included in children's historical texts. One might think only of the popularity of children's historical war fiction (such as Esther Forbes' 1946 Revolutionary war novel *Johnny Tremain*) or the prominence of wartime US presidents (such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln) in children's picture books and early readers to understand that certain kinds of violence are not absent but sanctioned in popular literature for children. Beyond these nationalist histories, children's literature has also been a site for radical content.<sup>21</sup> Antislavery histories were, of course, the purview of white and Black children's authors alike.<sup>22</sup>

While Brown is most often exceptionalized in histories of white abolition, in Black histories, his radical abolitionism is less exceptional. This is also true within African American histories written for children. In African American children's literature, as in discussions of him in other Black contexts, Brown is presented within the history of Black abolitionism. As a figure of interest for Black history, then, it makes sense that he would be included in histories presented to children. In these histories, Brown's radicalism and immediacy are not exceptional precisely because he is presented alongside Black abolitionists.

Silas Xavier Floyd's 1905 *Floyd's Flowers: Or, Duty and Beauty for Colored Children, Being One Hundred Short Stories Gleaned from the Storehouse of Human Knowledge and Experience* includes a description of an Ohio monument to three Black men—Shields Green, John A. Copeland, and Lewis S. Leary—the last of whom died at Harper's Ferry and the former two of whom were hanged for their participation. In this account, we also read about John Brown. The chapter focusing on Green describes the meeting between him and Brown, via Frederick Douglass, an "associate and intimate friend" of Brown, and with whom Green had been staying. In its discussion of Green's martyrdom for the cause

of abolition, it also weaves his connection to the white abolitionist. Floyd describes the impossibility of Green and his companions rescuing Brown and Green's devotion to the mission's commander, including his ultimate willingness to "go down and die with the old man", meaning John Brown". This selection ends by describing Green's martyrdom: "There is scarcely a more touching incident than this in all our national history".<sup>23</sup> In many ways, Floyd's *Flowers* was not a radical text. Nazera Wright describes the conduct book as emphasizing "a conservative agenda that promoted propriety, morality, and decorum".<sup>24</sup> However, in this early twentieth-century context, Black pride is promoted through Black antislavery history. Brown appears not as a fanatical outlier but alongside Black martyrs in a "touching" history of interracial solidarity within the Black freedom struggle. Brown becomes relevant within this Black history.

In one example from the *Brownies' Book* in 1920, we encounter an explicit framing of interest in both Black history and John Brown for Black child readers. Created by W.E.B. Du Bois, Augustus Granville Dill, and Jessie Redmon Fauset, the periodical includes letters written by its readers. Among the letters in a recurring section called "The Jury", Pocahontas Foster of Orange, N.J. comments on the magazine as grounds for encouraging children's interest in history. Foster writes,

I have never liked history because I always felt that it wasn't much good. Just a lot of dates and things that some men did, men whom I didn't know and nobody else whom I knew, knew anything about. Just something to take up one hour of the three hours left after school.

But since I read the stories of Paul Cuffee, Blanche K. Bruce and Katy Ferguson, real colored people, whom I feel that I do know because they were brown people like me, I believe I do like history, and I think it is something more than dates.<sup>25</sup>

Scholars have usually counted Pocahontas Foster among the *Brownies' Book's* child readers when noting her contributions. While it is not clear exactly how old Foster would have been when she wrote this letter to the magazine, she was likely among the *Brownies' Book's* older readers and not a child, herself (via a 1919 letter to W. E. B. Du Bois, Foster had already accepted a position as a stenographer and file clerk at the *Crisis* by the time the *Brownies' Book* began publication).<sup>26</sup> Still, interpretations of Foster as "young" follow the periodical's framing of her as a reader of the *Brownies' Book* and it stands to reason that younger readers might align themselves with her comments here. Expanding one's view of history beyond rote memorization and remote, masculinist accounts seems a clear antidote to improve the subject, as does racial inclusion. The history that interests Foster is indeed "something more than dates", "stories of . . . real colored people". What she calls for is a narrative Black history, much like the account of Shields Green in *Floyd's Flowers* and that which other African American children's literature from the *Brownies' Book* to later children's biographies would center. While this reader aligns her historical interests racially, she also goes on to offer other possibilities.

Foster continues her letter with an account of reading the paper aloud to an eight-year-old friend, Beatrice Turner, who herself comments by requesting not only history about Black figures, but also about John Brown. Whether real or fictionalized, Beatrice Turner's position is presented as that of a young person with whom *Brownies' Book* readers might identify even more clearly than with Foster's. According to Foster, Turner agrees with her assessment, saying:

Now that's just the kind of history I like. Won't you ask THE BROWNIES' BOOK to tell some more stories like that? I would like so much to know the story of John Brown. I have heard so many people talk about him and we used to sing a song about him, but nobody seems to know what he really did,—I don't.<sup>27</sup>

Turner's request for further discussion of John Brown amid a call for history that otherwise centers Black figures is noteworthy. First, it highlights Brown's resonance in folk song. She likely refers to the popular song "John Brown's Body", a ballad that rose in popularity and the tune to which Julia Ward Howe set "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"

in 1861. Although Howe's lyrics are now likely better known than those commemorating the anti-slavery martyr, this is one place his story and history resonated in Black children's culture. The song was sung in schools for freed people during Reconstruction.<sup>28</sup> As Turner's account shows, the song's legacy extended into the early twentieth century, even as a common popular understanding of Brown's history may have waned (at least among young singers of the tune). Turner's request is not the only mention of John Brown in the children's magazine.

The *Brownies' Book* for May 1921 included the second installment of a series called "Girls Together", by Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman, which recounted events in the life of antislavery Quaker activist Rebecca Buffum (Spring).<sup>29</sup> The beginning of the installment discusses Buffum's encounter with a self-emancipated Black woman named Susan, as she navigates the North as a free woman. The end of the piece addresses Spring's relationship to John Brown, who she visited in prison before he was hanged. The description of Brown's hanging highlights his abolitionist effort and its opposition. We read, "In October, 1859, as nobody in America must ever forget, John Brown made an effort to induce the slaves of Virginia to leave their masters in such numbers, that the institution of slavery, in that State, would crumble away itself".<sup>30</sup> The brief history of Brown included in this piece responds to the call represented by Beatrice Turner and the assumption that young readers of the magazine will benefit from knowing it.

Although this piece recounts Brown's history only briefly, it makes his political alignments clear. Spring positions Brown against his proslavery captors and executioners, here shown in light of the Civil War and its aftermath. She writes, "John Brown was finally taken prisoner, by Colonel Robert E. Lee, who, you will remember, later committed treason".<sup>31</sup> Recounting Brown's hanging, Wyman further notes, "Robert E. Lee managed the military parade at the execution, and John Wilkes Booth, who afterwards assassinated Abraham Lincoln, was a volunteer among the soldiers".<sup>32</sup> This situating of Brown does not allow his violence to stand alone but recognizes it in a larger history of violence meant to preserve slavery.

As John Brown's story is recounted in these Black histories, his radical abolitionism is understood more broadly than when framed within exclusively white antislavery histories. In these Black accounts, he is also memorialized in accordance with myth and his own wishes. Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson's 1920 collection of readings, *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, which included David B. Fulton's "Memorial Day in the South," includes John Brown in its "Decoration Day" remembrances. In this piece, Fulton focuses on the Civil War dead, but also looks back to Brown, writing that "To the Afro-American woman of the South on that day will come vivid recollections of the inexplicable gloom that pervaded the land everywhere when John Brown went to the scaffold".<sup>33</sup> This universalized Black woman's mourning of Brown is meant to be shared by the child readers of this volume. Dunbar-Nelson dedicated the volume in this way: "To the children of the race which is herein celebrated, this book is dedicated, that they may read and learn about their own people".<sup>34</sup> Here, we see Brown positioned among "our own people" and a practice of relaying his memory to new generations of Black children. I skip now from these mentions of Brown in early African American children's literature to the mid-to-late-twentieth-century rise of the genre, to show how these Black literary traditions of his representation have been sustained in more recent African American children's literature. Lorenz Graham's John Brown books carry on these traditions of African American writing about him.

#### 4. Graham's Twentieth-Century John Brown Moment

Graham wrote his John Brown books in a moment of renewed attention to African American literature and history. Following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court case and the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s (and the racist backlash that ensued), increasing public attention was given to the treatment of race and racism in U.S. children's literature. In 1965, former president of the International Reading Association Nancy Larrick's essay, "The All-White World of Children's Books", addressed the un-



derrepresentation of Black people (and especially the underrepresentation of realist and positive images of Black people) in U.S. children's literature. That year, the Council on Interracial Books for Children was established to address these issues of representation. Additionally, in 1969 the American Library Association established the Coretta Scott King Book Awards to honor African American authors and illustrators. With a career running through the mid-century Civil Rights Movement, Graham's writing is situated in what Michelle Martin has called the "Golden Age" of African American children's literature, during which African American children's book publishing increased more rapidly and with more public attention than in previous decades.<sup>35</sup>

Graham was already a groundbreaking African American children's author by the time he penned his two books about Brown. With a career that spanned from the 1940s through the 1980s, Graham is known best for his collations of African-based religious stories and for his Town Series about a Black boy growing up amid the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th century.<sup>36</sup> Like other Black authors both before and after him, Graham was committed to presenting fuller and more accurate representations of Black people to child readers. This is fitting with other trends in African American children's literature. Because African American children's literature has historically supplemented or corrected absences and misinformation about Black people in white-dominated children's texts, educational curricula, and popular culture, it makes sense that Black American writers have tended strongly toward representing Black people. Among African American children's literature, Graham's books on Brown are therefore unusual in their focus on a white historical figure. For example, winners of the Coretta Scott King Award from the 1970s and 1980s overwhelmingly focus on Black figures, both historical and fictional.

In this historical moment, focusing African American children's books on a white figure may seem counterintuitive, risking the semblance of saviorhood at the expense of diminishing other figures. However, given how Brown's history is intertwined with and guided by the work of Black activists, his biography presents an opportunity to illustrate the possibility of white action—even in the midst of its rarity and improbability. Katharine Capshaw notes how Civil Rights Era African American picture books illustrated "the possibility of child political agency" for readers.<sup>37</sup> We might similarly say that Graham's picture book (and, one might argue, his illustrated biography) similarly illustrated the possibility of white political agency via Brown. That is, Brown's history makes clear that white people's alignment with white supremacy was and is not necessary or inevitable, even while it has, historically, been common and predictable. Graham's readers, in the 1970s and beyond, might read this history with a mind to similar political possibilities in their own moment. Graham frames Brown in this way—as a useful historical figure for larger antiracist projects. Julia Mickenberg counts Lorenz Graham (and his sister, Shirley Graham) among Cold War era writers of the Old Left generation, whose work had, by the late 1960s, become increasingly radical.<sup>38</sup> *John Brown's Raid*, for example, was published in Scholastic's Firebird Books series, which Mickenberg calls "strikingly political" in its treatment of histories of racism and oppression. Despite the eventual abolition of slavery, a white abolitionist who used violence in defense of Black freedom was an undeniably radical figure. The radicality of a book featuring—and celebrating—such a figure becomes clearer still in light of the centering of moderate white abolitionism in national histories. Brown remains a controversial figure because his activism was not the stuff of peaceful protest. He waged violence in opposition to that of the state and alongside Black people, rather than only in a state-sanctioned war that is often framed as having been waged on Black people's behalf. Graham's attention to this image of white abolitionism acknowledges this radical avenue for white participation in Black freedom efforts, offering an alternative to dominant versions of white antislavery history.

Beyond the "Golden Age" of African American children's literature, Graham's books might also be regarded within the larger scope of writing about Brown in this historical moment. Graham's books appeared amid a wealth of new scholarship about Brown and the increased availability of nineteenth-century African American (and adjacent) texts,

made available for twentieth century readers via new inroads into publishing. At the close of *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom* Graham includes a short bibliography that makes this publication landscape clear. Graham's children's books appeared alongside recent biographies of Brown, including Stephen B. Oates' 1970 *To Purge This Land with Blood*, Jules Abels' 1971 *Man on Fire: John Brown and the Case for Liberty*, and Richard O. Boyer's 1973 *The Legend of John Brown: A Biography and History*. Graham also notes Benjamin Quarles' foundational book, *Black Abolitionists*, published by Oxford University Press in 1969.

Graham's reading list also included recent editions of early work on Brown, such as the Arno Press's *The American Negro: His History and His Literature* series reprintings of Richard Josiah Hinton's 1894 *John Brown and His Men* (in 1968) and Osborn Perry Anderson's 1861 *A Voice from Harper's Ferry* (in 1972) as well as a 1962 edition W. E. B. Du Bois' ([1909] 2001) biography of Brown (from International Publishers), a 1969 edition of Franklin Benjamin Sanborn's 1885 *The Life and Letters of John Brown* (from Negro Universities Press), and a 1970 reprinting of white abolitionist James Redpath's 1860 *The Public Life of Captain John Brown*.<sup>39</sup> Graham's books are possible and relevant, in part, because of this larger context for renewed interest in Brown. This list for "Further Reading" both encourages readers to learn more and situates Graham's work in these larger conversations about Brown, from writing by those who knew him personally (like Anderson) to biographers of the late twentieth century.

Beyond these print contexts, Graham's books trace Brown's relevance via continuities with his own late twentieth-century political moment. Although Graham's 1972 picture book does not include an introduction or conclusion explicating Brown's contemporary relevance, he ends this first book on Brown with a gesture toward the future. His climactic twelfth chapter recounting the raid closes with Brown's words from an 1859 prison interview, in which he predicted "You may dispose of me very easily. I am nearly disposed of now; but this question is still to be settled—this negro question I mean; the end of that is not yet".<sup>40</sup> Graham concludes his picture book not with Brown's execution but with the impending Civil War that would bring about emancipation. The final image in the book is a broadside of "John Brown's Song", making this familiar connection, that "his soul's marching on" in these later battles. Readers in the 1970s might well have extended the meaning of Brown's words beyond the war, however. Just as African Americans responded with realistically guarded hope to the Reconstruction Amendments, Graham's contemporaries knew that the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s had not eradicated institutionalized racism in the nation and there was more work to be done.

In his introduction to the 1980 biography, Graham is more explicit about connecting Brown's history to the project of combatting racism in the twentieth-century. In this Introduction, Graham explains his interest in Brown in terms of continuities between Brown's time and his own, writing that "We need to share Brown's view of the destructive aspects of slavery. Then we will recognize the self-poisoning effects of race hatred. We need to know why he so willingly died. Then we will understand why today some men and women are willing to give their lives in the struggle for social justice".<sup>41</sup>

Concluding the introduction, Graham explains that the rights of Black people in the United States are still unsettled. While the question of slavery has been resolved, the question of racial equality remains, as

Some people still believe that members of their own race are inherently superior to members of other races. In America some white people want to keep black people in a separate and unequal status. Those who struggle for full equality in education and employment meet resistance not only in words but also in the form of violence. After reading about John Brown and the conditions in his day, we will better understand some of the problems with which we still have to deal.<sup>42</sup>

Thus summarizing his present aims, Graham indicates how books about Brown's life and work allow children to read history through a lens that refuses to naturalize racism and calls us to demand better in the present. Brown is relevant not only as a historical

figure, then, but as an example illustrating what forms of antiracism were—and are still—possible. Acknowledging the long history of writing about Brown that precedes his own work, Graham argues that Brown's story needs to be told and re-told: "The story of John Brown and his cry for freedom is now given again because his life did indeed help to make this country to be what it is today, and his beliefs, his words, and his prophesies apply to present conditions".<sup>43</sup> Situating Brown within Black antislavery contexts as well as his own moment of publication allows readers to understand him within a broader and more accurate historical context.

As Graham presents a more complex view of abolitionism than a simple progress narrative, he also presents abolitionism from and for Black perspectives on white antislavery efforts. While Brown is exceptional, he is not impossible. Placing Brown (as other Black writers have done) in relation to his African American contemporaries rather than just in comparison to moderate white antislavery activists offers a more complete picture of this U.S. history. Graham's books resist flattening Brown's history because he places Brown within and alongside Black history. Both the pictorial history of the Harper's Ferry raid and the biography align with the patterns of reading Brown within Black History—a history that both includes and represents him specifically for Black children.

### 5. Reading Graham's John Brown

In a 1985 interview, Graham attests "No white man could have written my book on John Brown".<sup>44</sup> Both of Graham's books about Brown—the picture book *John Brown's Raid: A Picture History of the Attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia* (1972) and the young adult biography *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom* (1980)—read him beyond the context of white moderate antislavery discourse. More than merely describing his racialized approach to a historical figure, Graham here indicates that he grounds his books in the long literary history of Black writing about Brown. In this, Graham follows the precedent of other Black writers. Moreover, Graham's books respond in various ways to earlier African American children's contexts.<sup>45</sup> I discuss them together in their shared aim to present Brown for Black children's history readers. Graham's books (like earlier African American writing about Brown) present him as someone influenced by and in community with Black people of his time.

Although his picture book account focuses specifically on the Harper's Ferry raid rather than on the biographical more generally, here, too, Graham reads this event through the lens of Brown's longer Black historical context. This lens offers what might also be understood as a history text in which Brown appears as one actor among many, despite the significance of his raid. Importantly, Graham's treatment of Brown's violence is not decontextualized from other histories of violence. This includes revolutions, slave revolts, and the anti-Black violence of slavery itself. While this contextualization may seem commonsensical, narratives including proslavery literature, plantation nostalgia genres, and children's texts have histories of problematically softening slavery for both adult and child audiences.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, other authors have refused to obscure slavery's inherent violence, even in writing for children. For example, Graham opens his picture book by presenting Brown's abolitionist violence within the larger context of slavery's violence by including a reproduced image of the slave ship *Brookes* and accounts of kidnappings in supposedly "free" states. Additionally, he notes Black resistance to violence among Brown's Black influences, citing David Walker's 1829 *Appeal*, which asked African Americans, "Had you rather not be killed than to be a slave to a tyrant who takes the life of your mother, wife, a dear little children?" and commenting, "This was a question that John Brown would not forget".<sup>47</sup> Like Black biographers before him, Graham frames Brown alongside other histories of Black revolutionary action—from Black participants in the American Revolution to the longer Black freedom struggle of radical actors such as Nat Turner.

As Graham shows, Brown's intellectual, political, and moral inspirations also included his Black contemporaries. Alongside prominent white abolitionists with whom he was in conversation, Graham notes the influence of Black antislavery advocates. These include

Frederick Douglass, of course, but also lesser-known figures such as Jeremain Wesley Loguen and Henry Highland Garnett. Such leaders were invested not only in abolition but also broader antiracist projects that addressed the discriminatory laws of the North, which affected personal safety, labor, and education. Graham presents Brown's antislavery development as a product of both his white antislavery upbringing and political Black thought. The biography describes Brown's awareness of these problems via his own observation, and also as he forms further relationships with Black people.

This biography outlines Brown's early moral and abolitionist development in a chapter called "Brown Forms His Own Opinions". Here, we read about the oft-recounted encounter with the enslaved Black boy. In this telling, Graham dwells, though briefly, on this enslaved child: "The slave was about the same age as John. John saw that the boy worked hard and that he was smart. The two boys talked together. John believed they could have become friends, but he realized that their lives were very different".<sup>48</sup> These children are presented as peers, as we read about Brown's "silent horror" as his friend is beaten, his bold articulation of his own antislavery education in the face of the enslaver and child abuser, and a recognition of the very real threat to this other child's life that this beating posed. Graham gives no unnecessary embellishment of the 12-year-old boy's intervention in this scene, but concludes the episode noting that "John never forgot that slave boy, and he never forgot that slave owner".<sup>49</sup> A briefer account of the episode appears in *John Brown's Raid*, but this version similarly characterizes the two boys as friends and notes the lasting impression this encounter had on Brown. This shorter telling also gives a clear sense of injustice and white privilege, as "John noticed how differently they were treated. While he was praised and fed, the slave was beaten and went hungry".<sup>50</sup> Rather than embrace this privilege, however, Brown continues to develop fuller relationships with Black people.

While this event seems to be Brown's first encounter with slavery, it is not his only relation to Black people. The biography represents Brown also in conversation with Black people in everyday contexts, including beyond more clearly antislavery work. Before reading about Brown's antislavery plans, we are told:

It was in Springfield that Brown first became well acquainted with blacks. He met with them as individuals, and he hired some in his business. He visited in their homes and got to know them as families. He went to their churches, and he often sat quietly in their meetings while they talked about their problems and their hopes and their fears. With them he considered himself an equal. They sat at his table, and he sat at theirs.<sup>51</sup>

Graham here shows Brown in community with Black people, among folks for whom antislavery sentiment was not exceptional.<sup>52</sup> Graham shows Brown as also observing Black intellectual community, as "He saw free men asserting themselves as individuals and in groups. He took time to visit other cities to meet more".<sup>53</sup> Readers see that Black antislavery thought and action exist apart from Brown. This framing of Brown as a participant in a broader movement—and one that does not simply prioritize white participants—resists representations that depict Brown as a white savior.

Even in its focus on Brown, Graham's picture book does not lose sight of his accomplices. In a 2019 essay occasioned by the 160th anniversary of the Harper's Ferry raid, Eugene Meyer lamented that the five African American men who participated in the raid with Brown have been "overlooked, overshadowed by their martyred commander, treated as footnotes, if at all, in the John Brown saga". Meyer goes on to describe "African American soldiers, all but forgotten" and "unmentioned" in many commemorative accounts.<sup>54</sup> While this may be true in white histories and commemorations, it is not necessarily the case in Black ones. Langston Hughes, for example, in his 1931 poem to John Brown, writes of

John Brown  
Who took his gun,  
Took twenty-one companions,

White and black,  
Went to shoot your way to freedom . . . <sup>55</sup>

Neither does Graham ignore Brown's Black compatriots. *John Brown's Raid* includes a seven-page spread with pictures and brief descriptions of the twenty-one men who comprised "John Brown's Army". These images and brief notes are repeated across four pages of the chapter on Harper's Ferry in *John Brown: A Cry for Freedom*. The latter's chapter quotes extensively from Frederick Douglass (who gives an account of a meeting with Brown and Shields Green) and Osbourne Perry Anderson. Readers of Graham's history would not understand these figures as "forgotten", but, like readers of *Floyd's Flowers*, find these Black histories essential for understanding Brown's. Following the wishes of young Beatrice Turner, whose friend recounted her interest in learning about Brown in the *Brownies' Book* and those reading his memorialization in the *Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, Graham's books continue the tradition of presenting Brown alongside these Black histories.

In light of historical treatment of Brown, we might consider how the young readers of Graham's books might receive the image of Brown kissing a Black child. While the picture book omits this scene in its rather brief account of the execution, toward the end of the biography, Graham reproduces Thomas Hovenden's 1884 *The Last Moments of John Brown*, with the caption "John Brown kissing a slave woman's child as he leaves the jail for his execution". The account of this moment of embrace is brief but illustrates Brown's interest in Black people and Black people's interest in Brown. We read that "Another woman called to him, 'God bless you, old man. I wish I could help you'", offering a small amount of comfort to the condemned man, while noting that citizens were not allowed to be present for the actual hanging. Graham does not leave Brown on the scaffold, however, but traces his memory forward.

Before concluding with lyrics to the song memorializing him and an account of how "the legend of John Brown" mattered for the larger antislavery movement that would soon lead to the Civil War, Graham gives an account of a funeral service in Brown's hometown of North Elba, New York. Among the family mourners, Graham recounts that "As the coffin was lowered into the grave, Lyman Epps, an ex-slave, with his wife and children, sang one of John Brown's favorite hymns".<sup>56</sup> As readers imagine this scene, we might picture some of the Black mourners Brown himself wished for—including Black children—singing

Blow ye the trumpet, blow  
Sweet is Thy work, my God, my King.  
I'll praise my Maker with my breath.  
O, happy is the man who hears.  
Why should we start and fear to die  
With songs and honors sounding loud  
Ah, lovely appearance of death.<sup>57</sup>

While the image of Brown kissing a child at the scaffold may well be fiction rather than history, this image of Black children is not.

The Epps family were friends and neighbors to the Browns, among the small community of Black property owners in that area, and collaborators in the antislavery community who also participated in the Underground Railroad work of harboring of fugitives on their way to Canada. The family included four children, including Lyman Epps, Jr., who would later recount his own childhood memories of Brown. Epps, Jr. described Brown as "a true friend of my father's . . . He'd walk up to our house on the Table Lands and come in and play with us children and talk to father. Many's the time I've sat on John Brown's knee. He was a kind and friendly man with children".<sup>58</sup> This account from a Black man who knew Brown from a child's perspective connects visual representations of Brown (including the mythological) to Brown's own connections to Black history, which was not only national but also personal.

In 1935, Epps, Jr. was present at the unveiling of Italian American artist Joseph Pollia's statue of Brown and a Black youth (Figure 2: Pollia—John Brown and Black youth). Commissioned by the John Brown Memorial Association, the statue is located at the John Brown Farm in Lake Placid, New York (now a New York State Historic Site). The image is not one that mimics the kneeling slave of white abolitionist visual rhetorics, but is more complex. Here, an adult Brown holds his arm around a child (presumably a boy) who only reaches his shoulder. Their relation seems de-sentimentalized; neither holds a look of particular pain or joy, but rather they seem in serious conversation, holding some common understanding. Historian Louis A. DeCaro considers this statue alongside Epps, Jr.'s history, writing "Perhaps the figure of the black youth standing next to Brown is, in part, an idealization of Lyman Eppes' life long devotion to John Brown. Whether or not his story was a direct inspiration to Pollia as a sculptor is not clear. But it is not hard to imagine what it must have meant to Lyman, especially in his final years".<sup>59</sup> Historical records conflict, so it is unclear how old Epps, Jr. may have been when he sat on Brown's knee or when he sang at his funeral, but this very real Black man's remembrances of his own childhood may give pause to those who might dismiss the image of Brown kissing the Black baby as mere fabrication. We might instead read this popularly circulated image and the statue at his former home alongside these histories of connecting the man to a history in which Black children figured and in which they may be interested.



**Figure 2.** Joseph Pollia, John Brown, John Brown's Farm State Historic Site, Lake Placid, New York, 1935. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph\\_Pollia#/media/File:John-Brown-Pollia-1935.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Pollia#/media/File:John-Brown-Pollia-1935.jpg) (accessed on 5 May 2022).

Inasmuch as Graham's framing of Brown is part of what might be called a Black children's history project, it also represents an image of white antiracist possibility. Early in *John Brown's Raid*, he explains, "Some men had always spoken against slavery" (p. 8), citing Brown's father Owen Brown as an example. De-exceptionalizing Brown in this way, Graham counters the naturalization of white racism that excuses this position because

it was common among white people of the time. This naturalization of white racism is all too common in children's literature. In a 2002 letter to the editor of the *Horn Book*, Jonda McNair proposes more children's literature about John Brown. The letter discusses a previously published interview with Russell Freedman in which he gives a familiar apologia of Abraham Lincoln, which pretends the president's racism is excusable because it was not recognizable as such in his historical context. This is, of course, not true. McNair's explanation of racism as identifiable, even in the past, makes for a useful comparison to his contemporary, John Brown, who she describes as "anti-racist by any [historical] standard".<sup>60</sup> Illustrating the dishonesty of a historical account that omits Lincoln's racist history and the responsibilities of a nonfiction author "whose books are read by thousands of children and adults", McNair holds out Brown as an apt counterexample.

In her letter to the *Horn Book*, McNair also calls for attention to white antislavery figures beyond the lauded Lincoln. She writes, "I would like to see Freedman write a book about John Brown or William Lloyd Garrison".<sup>61</sup> After the publication of Brown's two books, later African American children's literature has continued this work. Gwen Everett's *John Brown: One Man Against Slavery* (1993) gives an account of Brown from the perspective of his daughter, Annie, accompanied by illustrations selected from painter Jacob Lawrence's 1941 series commemorating Brown. Patricia McKissack and Fredrick McKissack's *Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts* (1996) includes John Brown among its array of Black radical antislavery figures. While the author of this essay is not convinced that a book about Brown by Freedman would necessarily be beneficial, McNair's suggestion echoes Graham's investment in telling and retelling Brown's story for child readers. As we consider, African American children's literature is one avenue fulfilling Brown's wishes for his remembrance. Graham's books follow a rich tradition of presenting him to Black children, and this occasion for considering this history calls not for closure but for the continuation of this project in future African American children's literature.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A connection worth noting is that W. E. B. Du Bois' second wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois, was Lorenz Graham's sister.

<sup>2</sup> See Fielder (2021), "Black Madness, White Violence, and John Brown's Legacy," *Abolition's Afterlives Forum*, *American Literary History* 33.1: e40–50. Accessed 15 April 2022. <https://academic.oup.com/alh/advance-article/doi/10.1093/alh/ajab006/6208115?searchresult=1#233672486>.

<sup>3</sup> See Quarles ([1972] 2001), *Allies for Freedom: Blacks on John Brown*, pp. 15–36.

<sup>4</sup> See Sinha (2016), *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, p. 454.

<sup>5</sup> Jackson (2019), *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence*, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Douglass (1848), *The North Star*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Du Bois ([1909] 2001). David Roediger, p. xxv.

<sup>8</sup> On this incident, see Reynolds (2005), *Abolitionist: The Man who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights*, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Quarles ([1972] 2001), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson (1861), *A Voice from Harper's Ferry; with Incidents Prior and Subsequent to Its Capture by Captain Brown and his Men*, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson (1861), *A Voice from Harper's Ferry*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> King (2011), *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*, p. xix.

<sup>13</sup> On the mythology surrounding this moment, see Malin (1940), "The John Brown Legend in Pictures. Kissing the Negro Baby," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 9.4, 339–341; and "The Legend of John Brown's Last Kiss" *Graphic Arts Collection*, Special

Collections, Firestone Library, Princeton University, 23 December 2020. Available online: <https://graphicarts.princeton.edu/20/12/23/the-legend-of-john-browns-last-kiss/> (accessed on 1 April 2022). This incident was, however, contested as early as 1885. For example, one account insisted that no Black people were present at Brown's execution, reporting that "The story that Brown kissed a negro baby at the foot of the gallows is an invention, for there were no colored people in the immediate vicinity of the place of execution." See "Lee's Capture of John Brown," *The Sun* (9 August 1885), p. 5.

14 Whittier (1959), "Brown of Osawatomie" *New York Independent*.

15 Edward H. House's account of this story seems to be its original source. See "The Execution" *New York Daily Tribune* (5 December 1859): 8. The account that appears in the *Anglo-African Magazine* seems to be a pastiche of sorts rather than a verbatim reprinting, but the two paragraphs that tell this story are identical to those in the *New York Daily Tribune*. See "The Execution of John Brown," *The Anglo-African Magazine* 1.12 (December 1859): 398. This was not the only reference to Brown in the *Anglo-African Magazine*. The above account of Brown's execution appeared alongside an extended, serialized account of "The Outbreak in Virginia" and was followed the next month with an allegory of sorts suggesting that Brown's violence would spark the revolutionary overturn of slavery, by Frances Ellen Watkins (Harper), and a poem by Joseph Murray Wells, "John Brown at Harper's Ferry."

16 The Execution of John Brown.

17 John Brown, letter to Mrs. George L. Stearns, Charlestown, Jefferson Co Va. 29 November 1859, in *The Tribunal: Responses to John Brown and the Harper's Ferry Raid*, ed. Stauffer and Trodd (2012), p. 70.

18 Whittier (1959), "Brown of Osawatomie."

19 Child (1869), "John Brown and the Colored Child," *Freedmen's Book*, pp. 241–42.

20 While age is not mentioned in Child's preface, she is clear that the text is meant to be shared among families and communities—read aloud by those who can to those who cannot. Some poems included here, such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's poem "Thank God for Little Children" have been identified as early African American children's literature. On this point, see Chandler (2017), "'Ye Are Builders': Child Readers in Frances Harper's Vision of an Inclusive Black Poetry," in *Who Writes for Black Children? African American Children's Literature before 1900*, ed. Katharine Capshaw and Anna Mae Duane, pp. 41–57.

21 For a selection of leftist radical children's literature, see, for example Mickenberg and Nel (2008), *Tales for Little Rebels: A Collection of Radical Children's Literature*.

22 For a selection of some of white-authored antebellum antislavery literature, see, for example, Deborah DeRosa (2003), *Domestic Abolitionism and Juvenile Literature, 1830–1865*.

23 Floyd (1905), *Floyd's Flowers; Or, Duty and Beauty for Colored Children, Being One Hundred Short Stories Gleaned from the Storehouse of Human Knowledge and Experience*, p. 185.

24 See Wright (2016), *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth*, p. 151.

25 Letter from Foster (1920), "The Jury," *Brownies' Book*. vol. 1, No. 5, p. 140.

26 See Letter from Pocahontas Foster to W. E. B. Du Bois, 6 October 1919. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers. University of Massachusetts, Amherst. <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b165-i137>.

27 Letter from Foster (1920), "The Jury," p. 140.

28 On this point, see Morris (2010), *Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction: The Education of Freedmen in the South, 1861–1870, 176–179*.

29 Although the *Brownies Book* generally featured Black authors, this piece's author, Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman, was the niece of Rebecca Buffum Spring. (Wyman was the daughter of the white activist Elizabeth Buffum Chace; Chace's younger sister was Rebecca Buffum Spring.) Spring published an essay on her encounter with Brown in prison, "A visit to John Brown in 1859." See *Virtuous Lives: Four Quaker Sisters Remember Family Life, Abolitionism, and Women's Suffrage*, ed. Salitan and Perera (1994), pp. 122–23. Another version of this account was published in the *New York Tribune*. See "A Visit to John Brown By A Lady," *New York Tribune*, 2 December 1859, p. 6.

30 Wyman (1921), "Girls Together," Part II, *Brownies' Book*. vol. 2. No. 5, p. 141.

31 Wyman (1921), "Girls Together," p. 141.

32 Wyman (1921), "Girls Together," p. 141.

33 "Jack Thorne", Fulton (1920), "Memorial Day in the South," *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, ed. Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, p. 212.

34 Dedication, *The Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, n.p.

35 Martin (2004), *Brown Gold: Milestones of African American Picture Books, 1845–2002*, pp. xi–xvii.

36 The Graham's collection of Bible stories told in West African traditions, *How God Fix Jonah* was first published in 1946. (A new edition was published in 2000.) Graham's *Town Series* includes *South Town* (1958), *North Town* (1965), *Whose Town* (1969), and *Return to South Town* (1976).

37 Capshaw (2014), *Civil Rights Childhood: Picturing Liberation in African American Photobooks*, p. xi

38 See Mickenberg (2005), *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*.



- 39 The importance of reprintings of early Black texts in this historical context cannot be understated. For example, on the above mentioned Arno Press series, see [Womack \(2020\)](#)'s "Reprinting the Past/Re-Ordering Black Social Life." *American Literary History* 32.4, pp. 755–80.
- 40 See [Graham \(1972\)](#), John Brown's Raid, 65. A transcript of this interview was published in the *New York Herald* on 21 October 1859.
- 41 [Graham \(1980\)](#): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. x.
- 42 [Graham \(1980\)](#): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. xi.
- 43 See Note 41.
- 44 [Irby \(1985\)](#), "MELUS Interview: Lorenz Bell Graham 'Living with Literary History'" MELUS 12.2 (Summer 1985), p. 79.
- 45 While African American children's literature about Brown, more generally, deserves more attention, Graham's books have been particularly neglected. For example, Tyler Hoffman prioritizes white-authored children's books and omits Graham's books entirely in "John Brown and Children's Literature" in *The Afterlife of John Brown*, ed., [Taylor and Herrington \(2005\)](#), pp. 187–202.
- 46 On the significance of this last point see, for example, discussions of Ramin Ganeshram and illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton's 2016 picture book *A Birthday Cake for George Washington*, such as [Thomas et al. \(2016\)](#). Much Ado About A Fine Dessert: The Cultural Politics of Representing Slavery in Children's Literature. *Journal of Children's Literature* 42: 6–17.
- 47 [Graham \(1972\)](#), John Brown's Raid: A Picture History of the Attack on Harper's Ferry, Virginia (New York: Firebird Books/Scholastic Book Services), p. 15.
- 48 Lorenz Graham, John Brown (1980): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. 13.
- 49 [Graham \(1980\)](#): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. 14.
- 50 Graham, John Brown's Raid (1972), p. 11.
- 51 [Graham \(1980\)](#): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. 31.
- 52 Thus de-exceptionalizing Brown, it is notable that Graham (like the majority of his Black biographical predecessors) resists characterizing Brown as insane in this biography, explicitly emphasizing accounts who upheld Brown's sanity, See, for example, John Brown (1980): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. 153.
- 53 [Graham \(1980\)](#): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. 31.
- 54 [Meyer \(2019\)](#), "Five black men raided Harpers Ferry with John Brown. They've been forgotten." *The Washington Post*. 13 October, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2019/10/13/five-black-men-raided-harpers-ferry-with-john-brown-theyve-been-forgotten/> accessed on 15 April 2022. Meyer is also the author of *Five for Freedom: The African American Soldiers in John Brown's Army* ([Meyer 2018](#)).
- 55 [Hughes \(1992\)](#), "October 16: The Raid," in *The Panther & the Lash: Poems of Our Times*. 28–29. It is notable also that Hughes was the grandson of Mary Sampson Paterson who (before her marriage to Charles Langston) was the wife of Lewis Sheridan Leary, one of Brown's allies who was killed at Harper's Ferry.
- 56 [Graham \(1980\)](#): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. 161.
- 57 [Graham \(1980\)](#): *A Cry for Freedom*, p. 161. The song is the Methodist hymn written by Charles Wesley, "Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow."
- 58 Lyman Epps, Jr.'s remembrance of Brown is quoted in [Mary Lee \(1929\)](#), "John Brown Rests Amid the Mountains," *New York Times*, 20 October 1929, pg. SM4. On the Epps family's relationship with Brown see also Reynolds, John Brown, Abolitionist, p. 127.
- 59 See [DeCaro \(2016\)](#), "Lyman Eppes Jr.'s Christmas Memory of John Brown," *John Brown Today: A Biographer's Blog*, Sunday, 25 December 2016. <https://abolitionist-john-brown.blogspot.com/2016/12/lyman-eppes-jrs-christmas-memory.html> accessed 10 May 2022.
- 60 Jonda McNair, Letter to the Editor, *Horn Book* (November/December 2002), p. 131.
- 61 McNair, Letter to the Editor.

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