

The 11th Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University

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

October 29-31, 2009

Yale University

New Haven, Connecticut

The Old Man and the “DuBoisian Century”? Meditation and Speculation on the Direction of John Brown Biography in the 21st Century

Lou DeCaro Jr., Nyack/Alliance Theological Seminary

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

© Do not cite or circulate without the author’s permission

Abstract

Within this first decade of the 21st century, four biographies of John Brown have already been published, along with several other significant scholarly studies. Despite their varying approaches and themes, these works—leading into the sesquicentennial of the Harper’s Ferry raid and Brown’s execution—suggest an essentially positive, even appreciative view of Brown among his scholarly biographers. Are we seeing a new direction in biography that will sharply distinguish 21st century perceptions of Brown from that of the previous century? If so, why? My presentation will entail a brief reflection on two monumental biographies of John Brown by W. E. B. DuBois (1909) and Oswald Garrison Villard (1910), their meaning as representative texts, and how they might help us think about Brown biography today.