


Chapter 280 – President Buchanan And Other Northerners Push Back On The Pro-Brown Sentiment

	<p>Dates: December 1859 Forward</p>	<p>Sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Brown Rallies Are Held In The North • President Buchanan Delivers His State Of The Union Address To Congress
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Date: December 1859

Anti-Brown Rallies Are Held In The North



Edward Everett (1794-1865)

Southerners are angered by the shows of Yankee sympathy for Brown, but they are not alone in this regard.

They are joined by Northern conservatives who are fiercely dedicated to saving the Union and regard both Harpers Ferry and the Republican Party as threats to this outcome. Notable among this group are two Massachusetts men, the Whig, Edward Everett, an ex-Senator, Governor and Secretary of State, and the Democrat, Caleb Cushing, Attorney general under Franklin Pierce.

Everett lashes out against Emerson, his former student at Harvard, for blasphemy, and likens Brown’s plan as akin to the devastation caused by the 1791 black revolution in Santo Domingo. Cushing reminds listeners of the “merciless heart” exhibited by Brown at the Pottawatomie Massacre, and adds a dire prediction:

This is the commencement of Civil War in the United States.

A so-called “Anti-Brown rallies” draws almost 6,000 people to the Academy of Music Hall in New York City on December 19, 1859. It praises negro slavery as “decreed by nature” and labels those who support Brown as...

Disgraces to a Christian age and country.

Letters to this effect are read out to the crowd from Presidents Martin Van Buren, Millard Fillmore and Franklin Pierce, along with former candidate, General Winfield Scott.

A comparable event is held in Philadelphia, marked by large banners declaring:

Down with all Traitors, Factionists and Disunionists!

Soon enough these sentiments will translate into a new political entity known as the Constitutional Unionist Party.

It will comprise a diverse combination of Northerners and Border State Southerners, with roots in the Whig and Democrat parties, united around one paramount end – to save the Union.

Date: December 19, 1859

President Buchanan Delivers His State Of The Union Address To Congress

On the same day as the anti-Brown rally in NYC, James Buchanan delivers his third annual message to Congress. By this time his presidency has collapsed around him, even if he is not yet fully aware of the fact. It has been slain by one thing above all, his desire to appease his Southern friends and supporters on the protection of slavery, in order to achieve and try to retain his high office.

The address of December 19, 1859 is exceedingly long and rambling. The final two-thirds deals with foreign policy and with the nation's finances, including:

- The favorable relations achieved with China, Russia, France and most other nations
- Ongoing strains with Spain, especially over the ongoing attempt to purchase Cuba;
- Yet to be fully resolved treaties with Britain regarding central America.
- Threats from Mexico against US citizens and a proposal for military outposts in Sonora and Chihuahua.
- Support for a military force to enter Mexico should that prove necessary.
- The possible need for a show of naval force to insure safe passage in Panama and Nicaragua.
- Support for a transcontinental railroad, especially to facilitate the military defense of the west coast.
- Concern over a budget deficit of roughly \$6million for fiscal year 1859-60.
- A recommendation to raise tariffs to avoid future deficits.

But it is the front end of the text – dealing in detail with the issues of slavery – that is most telling. It reveals a President trying to convince himself that the issues are now resolved and that the threat of a civil war is over. Despite his best efforts to sound confident here, his words back and forth come across as hollow.

Due to that Almighty Power...the general health of the country has been excellent...

We have been exposed to many threatening and alarming difficulties in our progress, but...the danger to our institutions has passed away.

I shall not refer in detail to the recent sad and bloody occurrences at Harpers Ferry. Still, it is proper to observe that these events...may break out in still more dangerous outrages and terminate at last in an open war by the North to abolish slavery in the South....

...For myself I entertain no such apprehension... Questions which in their day assumed a most threatening aspect have now nearly gone from the memory of men...Such, in my opinion, will prove to be the fate of the present sectional excitement should those who wisely seek to apply the remedy continue always to confine their efforts within the pale of the Constitution.

Ever true to his Southern tilt, he says that the remedies must be accomplished...

... Without serious danger to the personal safety of the people of fifteen members of the Confederacy.

Having dismissed the threat, he returns to it again referencing Harpers Ferry.

I firmly believe that the events at Harpers Ferry, by causing the people to pause and reflect upon the possible peril to their cherished institutions, will be the means under Providence of allaying the existing excitement and preventing further outbreaks of a similar character

He is then on to continued praise for the *Dred Scott* decision, ending the legal debate on slavery.

I cordially congratulate you upon the final settlement by the Supreme Court of the United States of the question of slavery in the Territories... protected there under the Federal Constitution.

He does so while leaving room for those Democrats still attached to the role of popular sovereignty in the process of achieving statehood.

When in the progress of events the inhabitants of any Territory shall have reached the number required to form a State, they will then proceed in a regular manner and in the exercise of the rights of popular sovereignty to form a constitution preparatory to admission into the Union.

His discussion of slavery ends with a long monologue on the history of the institution in America and a paean to the blessings it has bestowed on the Africans.

For a period of more than half a century (their) advancement in civilization has far surpassed that of any other portion of the African race. The light and the blessings of Christianity have been extended to them, and both their moral and physical condition has been greatly improved.

At present (the slave) is treated with kindness and humanity. He is well fed, well clothed, and not overworked. His condition is incomparably better than that of the coolies which modern nations of high civilization have employed as a substitute for African slaves. Both the philanthropy and the self-interest of the master have combined to produce this humane result.

These perspectives by Buchanan on slavery could have been lifted from the pens of men like Thomas Dew and the Reverend James Thornwell in 1832, John C. Calhoun in 1837, James Hammond in 1845, George Simms in 1852 and a host of other “slavery as a positive good” advocates.