

The Relevance of Giuseppe Mazzini's Ideas of Insurgency to the American Slavery Crisis of the 1850s

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EARLY IN 1859 THE NOTORIOUS American abolitionist John Brown was in the frontier territory of Kansas, making plans to take eleven African-Americans, former slaves whom he had taken from their owners, to freedom in Canada. His raid was an unqualified success, and it buoyed his plans later that year to make a more daring raid nearer the heart of slavery, at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Captured by US marines inside a federal arsenal he had seized in that doomed venture, however, Brown would later be hanged for attempting to incite a slave uprising, a capital offence in the slave states.

But, despite his success in Kansas, Brown was hardly jubilant. Before setting out for Canada he predicted that the United States was on the eve of 'one of the greatest wars in history', in which 'slavery [could] triumph . . . [and thus] end . . . all aspirations for human freedom'. Brown believed that in 1860, if the antislavery Republican Party's candidate was elected to the presidency, 'there will be war' because southern proslavery interests 'will go out' of the Union. But, added Brown, the slave power would hardly find itself without allies. It would 'get the countenance and aid of the European nations, until American republicanism and freedom are overthrown'.¹

An earlier generation of historians pointed to the obvious flaws in Brown's doomed raid at Harpers Ferry and his obsession with slavery to portray him as 'unbalanced to the verge of' outright madness'. More recently, however, scholars have rejected the idea that Brown was out of touch with reality, given his apparent prophetic insight into how his raid, successful or not, could exacerbate tensions between the North and South. Brown's schemes instead have been attributed to his Protestant Calvinist sense that he

¹ Richard Hinton, *John Brown and His Men*, 1894 (New York, Arno Press, 1968), p. 681.

was a predestined agent of deliverance for the slaves and his overconfidence in the slaves' willingness to rise up in armed insurrection.²

Thus historians now have rightly placed Brown, even if they question his rationality, at the centre of explanations for why civil war erupted in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Still, most explanations have portrayed him as a singularly American character, respecting his fanatical religion or calculated 'homegrown' terrorism. An alternative aspect of Brown's significance, however, is the influence of revolutionary thought and events in Europe on his successful career of antislavery conspiracy, in particular the ideas and model of Giuseppe Mazzini.³

Similar to scholarly treatment of Brown, historians who emphasise that the Italian unification movement diverged from Mazzini's goal of unaided and unified republicanism have discounted his significance. Where others sought practical compromise, such assessments suggest, Mazzini, like Brown, was dogmatic or utopian, and unnecessarily reckless. Yet in their day neither man was considered irrelevant to his respective nation's violent unification movement. European radicals correctly interpreted Brown's Harpers Ferry raid as a signal of the spread of revolutionary upheaval beyond the boundaries of Europe in 1848, and, in the view of Karl Marx, one of the two 'biggest things that are happening in the world today'. Both liberals and conservatives interpreted the raid and then Brown's execution as indications of America's rejection of liberal reform. Meanwhile, the respective leaders of abolitionist and feminist movements in the United States, William Lloyd Garrison and Margaret Fuller, both hailed Mazzini as a cult figure. Mazzini lent assistance to American reformers' argument that American democracy, allegedly 'exceptional' in its tranquillity, was at risk.⁴

² Bruce Catton, *The Coming Fury* (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1961), p. 20; Stephen Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown* (New York, Harper & Row, 1970); David Reynolds, *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights* (New York, Knopf, 2005).

³ Sean Wilentz, 'Homegrown Terrorist', *New Republic*, 24 October 2005, 23–30. A recent study describing the influence of European revolutions on Brown is Albert Von Frank, 'John Brown, James Redpath, and the Idea of Revolution', *Civil War History*, 52 (June 2006), 142–60.

⁴ Raymond Grew, *A Sterner Plan for Italian Unity: The Italian National Society in the Risorgimento* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 5–10, 35–66; Spencer Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic: 1700 to the Present* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1995), pp. 85–114; Enrico Dal Lago, 'Radicalism and Nationalism: Northern "Liberators" and Southern Labourers in the USA and Italy, 1830–1860', in Enrico Dal Lago and Rick Halpern (eds), *The American South and the Italian Mezzogiorno* (New York, Palgrave, 2002), pp. 197–214; Seymour Drescher, 'Servile Insurrection and John Brown's Body in Europe', in Paul Finkelman (ed.), *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid* (Charlottesville, VA, University of Virginia Press, 1995), pp. 253–95; Gerald Runkle, 'Karl Marx and the American Civil War', *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, 6 (January 1964), 117–41, quoted at 120; Denis Mack Smith, *Mazzini* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1994), p. 167. The other 'big thing' to which Marx alluded was the serf movement in Russia.

Reconsideration of John Brown's precipitant actions in the 1850s shows him not as an 'insignificant frontier crook and petty horse thief' . . . and a fraud', as an early revisionist saw him, but as a vocational student of transatlantic politics and warfare. Brown lived at a time when American slavery, tolerated by governments on both sides of the Atlantic, seemed secure enough. The US Constitution protected slavery where it existed, and in 1857 the US Supreme Court ruled that black Americans could not be US citizens. Britain and France expressed sympathy for the Confederacy early in the Civil War, a posthumous vindication of Brown's fear that a seceded slave South could count on an alliance of the monarchies and dictatorships of Europe. President Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation during the Civil War, freeing slaves in the seceded states, barely helped persuade governments in London and Paris to maintain neutrality in the conflict. Lincoln, a moderate opponent of slavery, quickly condemned Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry, and as a war president initially resisted ending slavery on the grounds that 'emancipation would be equivalent to a John Brown raid, on a gigantic scale'. He finally ordered emancipation not as a moral imperative but only as a 'necessary war measure'.⁵

Brown, thus, had little reason in his lifetime to anticipate that governments on either side of the Atlantic would have much to do with ending American slavery. But his anticipation of an unholy alliance between American slavery and European conservatism in 1859 was hardly the first time he assessed American conditions in terms of European developments. For decades he had studied the tactics and objectives of European nationalist guerilla warfare to apply them in the United States. Like Giuseppe Mazzini, Brown devoted his life to revealing the republican character and capacity—through redemptive revolutionary violence, if necessary—of the most dispossessed class of his compatriots.

Some tantalising correspondences have been identified between John Brown's revolutionary career and the writings on guerilla warfare of Bianco di Saint-Jorioz, the advocate of the independence movement in Piedmont of 1821. Bianco went into exile in Spain, Greece, and Malta, and in the 1830s became a supporter of Mazzini's Young Italy movement, meanwhile publishing two studies on insurrectionary warfare. Bianco made several pertinent recommendations. He argued that a small nucleus of men, numbering 'from ten to ten thousand', and familiar with 'the nature of places, the character of the inhabitants, and the resources of the country', could start a large insurrectionary movement. The commander of the band should thoroughly

⁵ 'Final Emancipation Proclamation', in Don Fehrenbacher (ed.), *Abraham Lincoln, Speeches and Writings 1859-1865* (New York, Library of America, 1989), p. 424; Oates, *To Purge This Land*, p. 309; Reynolds, *John Brown*, p. 471.

consult maps and actual terrain of the area targeted for guerilla activity, ideally areas 'where our Principal enemies have weapon factories, arsenals, or warehouses . . . [to gain weapons] . . . or at least to prevent their service to the enemy'. At the outset, however, he should seek 'easy to discover . . . wood or metal . . . to make pikes or lances'. Meanwhile, he should be prepared to commit ruthless acts to promote 'secure and quick extermination of the . . . tyrants and their partisans, their defenders and instruments'. Only by 'obtaining a [notorious] reputation' could he hope to 'enhance his band' and thus 'secure the success of the undertaking'.⁶

Several aspects of Brown's exploits suggest his application of Bianco's principles. Brown led two dozen men in successfully defending an antislavery town in Kansas against 400 attackers, and had about that same number when he raided Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He began studying the mountainous area around Harpers Ferry as early as the 1830s, noting its strategic advantages. In 1847 he told the abolitionist Frederick Douglass:

God has given the strength of the hills to freedom; . . . they are full of natural forts, where one man for defense will be equal to a hundred for attack . . . My plan, then, is to take at first about twenty-five picked men . . . supply them arms and ammunition . . . [they] shall go down to the fields from time to time, as opportunity offers, and induce the slaves to join them, seeking and selecting the most restless and daring.

For the runaway slaves he anticipated to join his band at Harpers Ferry he had delivered 1,000 pikes, though of course the real prize in the town was its federal arsenal, which housed 100,000 muskets and rifles. In Kansas, Brown, four of his sons, and three other men dragged five suspected proslavery men out of their cabins and impassively dismembered them with swords. The widow of one of the victims later testified, '[Brown] said if a man stood between him and what he considered right, he would take his life as coolly as he would eat his breakfast.' Thus John Brown became 'Weird John Brown' in the uneasy words of Herman Melville. His fearful reputation was launched.⁷

⁶ Carlo Bianco di Saint-Jorioz, *Ai militari italiani*, ed. Enrica Melossi and Alessandro Galante Garrone, 1833 (Turin, Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 1975), p. 5; Raimondo Luraghi, *Storia della guerra civile americana* (Turin, Einaudi, 1966), pp. 127-55; Giulio Schenone, 'John Brown e il pensiero insurrezionale italiano', *Atti del I Congresso Internazionale di Storia Americana: Italia E Stati Uniti Dall'Indipendenza Americana Ad Oggi (1776/1976)* (Genoa, Tilgher-Genoa, 1978), pp. 357-66, at pp. 360-3.

⁷ Franklin Sanborn, *Recollections of Seventy Years*, 1909 (Detroit, MI, Gale Research Co., 1967), 2 vols, vol. 1, p. 152; James Redpath, *The Public Life of Captain John Brown*, 1860 (Freeport, NY, Books for Libraries Press, 1970), p. 43; Oates, *To Purge This Land*, pp. 62-3; James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York, Knopf, 1982), p. 146; Douglas Robillard (ed.), *The Poems of Herman Melville* (Kent, OH, Kent State University Press, 2000), p. 53.

Brown probably became aware of Bianco's ideas through his association with Hugh Forbes, a British mercenary who had commanded various Italian troops in defence of the Republic of Venice in 1848, and later served in the army of Giuseppe Garibaldi. Brown met Forbes in New York some time in the 1850s, having already, like Forbes, obtained first-hand experience in revolutionary Europe. Brown toured France, Germany, and possibly Austria in 1849, making notes of armies and battlefields. His study of Waterloo convinced him 'that the common military theory of strong places was unsound', and his observations of the slow movement of Austrian troops convinced him of the advantages of rapid manoeuvre.⁸

Brown was impressed enough with Forbes's background to ask him to reissue a handbook of tactics, called the *Manual of the Patriotic Volunteer*, which Forbes had written earlier. The *Manual* outlined the 'species of war . . . called insurrectionary . . . the only one [possible] . . . when . . . the tyrant . . . prevents his victims from being expert in the use of arms'. Forbes, like Bianco, referred to the successful guerilla warfare of Spain in the Napoleonic Wars. Brown on several occasions spoke of his study of the Spanish case.⁹

Forbes dedicated the *Manual* 'for the use of the Italian Revolutionary Volunteers who are anxious to prepare themselves . . . [because] circumstances which came to my notice in the years 1848 and '49 demonstrated to me the necessity of having a small book written especially for Patriots'. There was an active Young Italy contingent in New York in the 1840s and 1850s, led by Eleuterio 'Felix' Foresti, an exile from the Italian Carbonari movement now on the faculty of Columbia College. But clearly Forbes also anticipated that 'Patriots' opposed to tyrannical government in the United States would find the *Manual* useful as well. Endorsements printed on the *Manual*'s cover included a New York newspaper's opinion that 'every emigrant to Kansas should be furnished with a copy'. John Brown's activities in Kansas and Virginia were hardly the impulses of a madman. His regime was a calculated

⁸ Paul Ginsborg, 'Peasants and Revolutionaries in Venice and the Veneto, 1848', *Historical Journal*, 17 (September 1974), 503–50; Oates, *To Purge This Land*, pp. 200–1, 213; Schenone, 'John Brown', pp. 359–61; Richard Boyer, *The Legend of John Brown: A Biography and a History* (New York, Knopf, 1973), pp. 409–11.

⁹ Hugh Forbes, *Manual of the Patriotic Volunteer* (New York, W. H. Tinson, 1854), 2 vols, vol. I, pp. 13, 19. In addition to his familiarity with guerilla warfare in nineteenth-century Europe, Brown studied 'all the books upon insurrectionary warfare that he could lay his hands on', said one of his lieutenants in Kansas; and 'the successful opposition of the Spanish chieftains . . . when Spain was a Roman province. . . [and] the wars in Hayti [by blacks against French colonial slavery]'. He was also familiar with the Roman slave uprising of Spartacus. Franklin Sanborn, *John Brown, Liberator of Kansas and Martyr of Virginia*, 1885 (Cedar Rapids, IA, Torch Press, 1910), p. 136; Louis Ruchames (ed.), *A John Brown Reader* (London, Abelard-Schuman, 1959), p. 218.

application of theories of guerilla revolutionary war already tested in the Mediterranean countries.¹⁰

In the *Manual*, Hugh Forbes emphasised that success in a people's insurrectionary war depended on effective use of force, 'not simply upon the justice of our cause'. A just cause prosecuted through poor military strategy, Forbes warned, would be considered not a 'Revolution' but merely common 'Brigandage'. And, 'although the pen may prepare men's morale for a change, it is the sword which ultimately will decide between slavery and liberty'. Such a pragmatic emphasis on a war's outcome, not its inherent righteousness, was somewhat surprising, given that Forbes also especially noted the significance of Mazzini for furnishing 'materials out of which to make insurgents': 'Who among European patriots has done so much as Mazzini in preparing men's minds for a change?' Such an acknowledgement calls into question interpretation of Mazzini's nation-building ideology as impractically utopian.¹¹

In fact, in founding Young Italy, Mazzini had emphasised the role of insurrection, which, 'by means of guerilla bands[,] is the true method of warfare', he wrote, 'for all nations desirous of emancipating themselves from a foreign yoke':

The method of warfare supplies the want—invariably at the commencement of the insurrection—of a regular army; it calls the greatest number of elements into the field, and yet may be sustained by the smallest number. It forms the military education of the people, and consecrates every foot of the native soil by the memory of some warlike deed.

But Mazzini was no military expert. Critics have ridiculed him, citing such occasions as his planning 'the conquest of the Kingdom of Naples with the help of twenty-two men', or desiring 'to invade Italy with two hundred'. Similar to John Brown, Mazzini's 'thought, and the operations based on them' have been considered 'exceedingly amateurish'. Brown at his trial was asked sarcastically: 'What in the world did you suppose you could do here in Virginia?' He stated he had come with eighteen men, 'besides [him]self', and that his object was no less than 'to free the slaves . . . and to place [them] in a condition to defend their liberties'. Mazzini's and Brown's shared sense of their role as quasi-religious liberators of the masses conflicted with their planning for insurrectionary war, and thus impaired their military judgement. Hugh Forbes's salute to Mazzini owed not to Mazzini's

¹⁰ Forbes, *Manual*, p. vii; idem, *Extracts from the Manual for the Patriotic Volunteer* (New York, W. H. Tinson, 1857), p. 197; Schenone, 'John Brown', pp. 363–4; Howard Manaro, *American Opinion on the Unification of Italy 1846–1861* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1932), pp. 9–10.

¹¹ Forbes, *Manual*, p. 13; idem, *Extracts*, pp. 173–4.

military brilliance, but to another element of Mazzini's regime for national unification.¹²

Hugh Forbes enlisted in John Brown's band as a drillmaster and tactician, but soon betrayed Brown's Harpers Ferry plans to several members of the US Congress, who, somewhat inexplicably, did not take preventive action. Forbes's betrayal of Brown has been attributed to the two men's different views of slaves' capacity for courageous military action. But this explanation contradicts Forbes's refusal to enlist in Brown's band unless, as Forbes put it, Brown assured him he desired more than 'merely to get Kansas for free white people'. Judging from his experience in Europe, and his praise of Mazzini, Forbes was a radical republican. He served twin revolutionary causes in Europe and America in the idealistic anticipation that peasant groups had the capacity to demonstrate a republican identity.¹³

Through Forbes, then, Mazzini provided a transatlantic inspiration to Brown to act as an agent for American peasants, the slaves, in insurrectionary revolutionary warfare. Mazzini's writings and speeches bear out a spirit kindred to Brown. Mazzini was no Protestant Calvinist and was disaffected by the corruption of the Catholic Church, but said he belonged to a 'higher faith [whose] time has not yet come; and until that day, the Christian manifestation remains the most sacred revelation of the ever-onward-progressing spirit of mankind'. Like Brown, Mazzini read about and revered the Puritan regicide Oliver Cromwell, of whom historical studies appeared in the 1840s in Britain and America. He believed the Risorgimento needed martyrs to spread nationalism and to demonstrate that Italians were willing to die for their liberty, rather than always rely on outside assistance. It was wrong, he argued, to condemn insurrection by 'an enslaved population armed with daggers through want of better arms'. Such insurrections, even if they failed for lack of weapons or misguided leadership, were useful because they created alarm. In an introduction to Mazzini's writings published upon his death, William Lloyd Garrison noted how Europe's 'despotic rulers . . . seemed to regard his revolutionary spirit as ubiquitous, credit[ing] him with either inciting or participating in whatever conspiracies threatened their overthrow'. Mazzini realised the importance of insurrectionary leadership, but he emphasised, 'The revolutionist . . . neglects what are called tactics . . . [and] commits a thousand petty errors, [though he] redeems them by proclamation of some general maxims sooner or later useful.' Contradicting Karl Marx, he decreed

¹² Ruchames, *John Brown Reader*, p. 119; Di Scala, *Italy from Revolution to Republic*, pp. 66–7; Smith, *Mazzini*, pp. 6, 10; Walter Laqueur, 'Origins of Guerilla Doctrine', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10 (July 1975), 341–82, at 368.

¹³ Oates, *To Purge This Land*, p. 200. Forbes probably betrayed Brown because of his desire to lead the Harpers Ferry raid himself, and/or a motive to blackmail Brown's financial supporters.

‘the unity of mankind’ and the ‘educability of the whole human race’. But he also argued, in a point undervalued by those who see him only as a visionary, that in a democratic republic there had to be a redistribution of land from landlords to peasants to create a ‘more just distribution of the fruits of labour’, a precept enacted in southern Italy in the 1860s and a blueprint for the breakup of the *latifondi* (the landholding system of properties often as extensive as 200 hectares or more) after the Second World War.¹⁴

Such positions endeared Mazzini to the leading American antislavery and feminist reformers of the day. He of course was chiefly concerned with European not American emancipation, and in correspondence he urged abolitionists not to forget European republicans’ struggle against what he characterised as ‘white slavery’ in Italy, Poland, and Hungary. But unlike the Hungarian patriot Lajos Kossuth, who visited the United States but refused to denounce slavery in the hope of gaining financial and military support from proslavery Americans, Mazzini, while he supported the expansionist programme of ‘Young America’, denounced both slavery and racism, characterising abolitionism as a ‘holy cause’ and supporting black voting rights after the Emancipation Proclamation (which, incidentally, not only restored Europeans’ confidence in American democracy but was also deemed to vindicate John Brown’s guerrilla violence). William Lloyd Garrison saluted Mazzini’s ‘ethical vindication of man’s inalienable rights and of popular sovereignty . . . [that] shall ultimately find acceptance . . . [in] the liberation of every bondman’. But this leading abolitionist crusader, though a champion of non-violence, also implicitly noted a Mazzinian principle that linked the American antislavery and Italian unification movements: achievement of republican citizenship through redemptive revolutionary violence. ‘It is a more hopeful condition’, said Garrison, ‘to see an oppressed people asserting their God-given rights by force of arms, and staking their lives upon the issue, than to behold them abjectly cowering under despotic sway.’¹⁵

Likewise, the feminist Margaret Fuller found Mazzini to be a ‘great man’, the ‘inspiring soul’ of the ‘Patriots’ of the age. Unlike Hugh Forbes, who

¹⁴ William Lloyd Garrison (ed.), *Joseph Mazzini: His Life, Writings, and Political Principles* (New York, Hurd & Houghton, 1872), p. xxiv; Nagendranath Gangulee (ed.), *Giuseppe Mazzini: Selected Writings* (London, Lindsay Drummond, 1945), pp. 109–13; Smith, *Mazzini*, pp. 6, 17–18, 35, 40, 65, 88, 113–14, 124, 138, 199, and esp. 10, 104, and 123; idem, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 118, 159, 428–9, 451.

¹⁵ Garrison (ed.), *Joseph Mazzini*, p. xxvii; Donald Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America: A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848–1852* (Columbia, MO, University of Missouri Press, 1977); Joseph Rossi, *The Image of America in Mazzini’s Writings* (Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 1954), pp. 95–129; Paola Gemme, *Domesticating Foreign Struggles: The Italian Risorgimento and Antebellum American Identity* (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2005), pp. 75–6.

emphasised the importance of short-term success in nationalist warfare, Fuller believed 'such men as Mazzini conquer always—[they] conquer in defeat'. Fuller was in Europe during the 1848 revolutions as a journalist for the *New York Tribune*, and witnessed Italians' struggle for liberation at first hand. There she became an advocate of abolitionism and American support for the Italian republican movement. She used her newspaper writing in the *Tribune* as a forum to advocate these causes, which she saw as intertwined. Moreover, Fuller came to defend violence as a means for American slaves and Italians to overcome negative stereotypes and to demonstrate republican capacity. She praised the formation of Italian citizen militia units to oppose Austrian Hapsburg authority. When Romans lynched Pope Pius IX's chief minister she applauded the assassination. And, as invading French troops neared Rome, dispatched by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte to crush the Roman Republic and to restore Pius to the Vatican, Fuller urged Americans to supply cannons to help defend the city.¹⁶

Fuller took up the Italian revolutionary cause not only in defence of the Roman Republic, but also as a means to call America to end slavery. In Rome she exclaimed, 'How it pleases me here to think of the Abolitionists! [Their cause is] worth living and dying for[,] to free a great nation from such a threatening plague.' In the *Tribune* she described her encounter with an American who doubted the legitimacy of the Roman Republic because Romans, as he put it, 'were not like *our* people [emphasis original]'. Fuller found such smug American travellers revolting, for 'they talk about the degenerate state of Italy as they do about that of our slaves at home. They affirm that, because men are degraded by bad institutions, they are not fit for better.' For many Americans, it was dangerous for 'degenerate' peoples, abroad or within the United States, to consider revolution. Stationed in Rome, Fuller described how 'Americans I see . . . do not believe in the sentimental nations. Hungarians, Poles, [and] Italians are too demonstrative for them, too fiery, too impressible.' It was no coincidence that Fuller sympathised with the same 'sentimental nations' whose subordination Mazzini described as 'white slavery'. Like Mazzini, Fuller emphasised that Italians' capacity for revolutionary virtue was not fatally flawed. For her, they had proven their right to freedom simply by offering revolutionary resistance to Hapsburg and Bourbon authorities. The logic of Fuller's thought was that

¹⁶ Margaret Fuller, *These Sad but Glorious Days: Dispatches from Europe, 1846–1850*, ed. Larry Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 158–61, 239–41, 262–4; Rossi, *Image of America*, p. 58; Larry Reynolds, 'Righteous Violence: The Roman Republic and Margaret Fuller's Revolutionary Example', in Charles Capper and Cristina Giorelli (eds), *Margaret Fuller: Transatlantic Crossings in a Revolutionary Age* (Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).

American slaves, should they, like Italian patriots, arise and accomplish a dramatic political act — an uprising whose objective was violent liberation — would thereby prove themselves worthy of republican citizenship. Fuller embraced redemptive revolutionary violence at least partly through Mazzini's influence on her.¹⁷

It appeared by the mid-1850s, nonetheless, that counter-revolution had set in on both sides of the Atlantic. Fuller died tragically in a shipwreck off the New York coast. As did other fledgling democratic regimes established across Europe in 1848–9, the Roman Republic collapsed (and not having received US diplomatic recognition). Mazzini's influence in Italy seemed on the decline. And, with the enactment of a harsh federal fugitive slave law in 1850, the US government appeared intent on protecting the slave power against abolitionists' increasingly dramatic and desperate tactics.¹⁸

Such was the inauspicious setting for John Brown's appearance in the Kansas territory, but Brown of course was just getting started. Again he took stock of Europe. In an idiosyncratic treatise urging free black Americans not to be afraid to use force to resist white harassment, he recalled the sympathy that swelled for 'the Greeks struggling against the oppressive Turks, the Poles against Russia, [and] the Hungarians against Austria and Russia combined'. Such struggles, he said, show how 'the trial for life of one bold and to some extent successful man, for defending his rights in good earnest, would arouse more sympathy throughout the nation than the accumulated wrongs and sufferings of more than three millions of our submissive colored population'. Likewise he observed to his wife:

[T]here is an unusual amount of very interesting things happening in this and other countries at present and no one can yet foresee what is yet to follow . . . All Europe may soon be in a blaze . . . I will only say in regard to these things that I rejoice in them from the full belief that God is carrying out his eternal purpose in them all.

Revolutionary Europe provided Brown with both practical and providential evidence for his insurrectionary regime.¹⁹

Meanwhile, believing that 'human nature was the same everywhere', he anticipated that should slaves be offered instruction in 'the useful and

¹⁷ Fuller, 'These Sad but Glorious Days', pp. 165–6, 159, 257; Robert Hudspeth (ed.), *Letters of Margaret Fuller*, 6 vols (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1983–94), vol. 5, p. 194; Francis Kearns, 'Margaret Fuller and the Abolition Movement', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 25 (January–March 1964), 120–7; Gemme, *Domesticating Foreign Struggles*, pp. 50–1; Larry Reynolds, 'Righteous Violence'.

¹⁸ Jane Pease and William Pease, 'Confrontation and Abolition in the 1850s', *Journal of American History*, 58 (March 1972), 923–37.

¹⁹ Sanborn, *John Brown*, p. 124; Boyer, *Legend*, p. 445.

mechanical arts, and all the business of life', in the words of one of his Kansas confederates, they would prove fully capable of self-government. He apparently planned, therefore, for freed slaves to be situated on land holdings along the Allegheny mountains. But, to make this land settlement programme possible, 'a forcible separation of the connection between master and slave was necessary'. Thus he was 'not averse to the shedding of blood', because using guns gave black men 'a sense of their manhood[:] no people could have self-respect, or be respected, who would not fight for their freedom'. After the collapse of his Harpers Ferry raid and shackled in a Virginia jail, Brown even maintained a strategic outlook about his own imminent death. He acknowledged shortly after his sentencing, 'I am worth inconceivably more to hang than for any other purpose', and he approved a newspaper editorial, 'Let Virginia make him a martyr!' Thus the details of Brown's plans and outlook—liberation of landless labourers through use of potentially deadly force in order to teach and demonstrate the labourers' civic virility, practical education and land acquisition for and by these peasant labourers, and embrace of the role of a martyr—were echoes of Mazzini.²⁰

Italian unification by the 1860s progressed along a path in violation of Mazzinianism: loss of faith in the practicality of indigenous revolution, acceptance of support for unification from France, a great power outside the Italian nation, and acceptance of monarchism over republicanism. But if Mazzini at the time seemed less relevant to Italians' march towards independence and achievement of popular sovereignty, his writings and influence about the significance of guerilla revolutionary warfare resonated with contemporaneous developments in the United States, a country itself coming apart over the question of whether peasant labourers had the capacity for democratic citizenship. Mazzini's concept of insurrection as a demonstration of slaves' civic identity and as a consecration of the soil through the blood of martyrs helped to convince American reformers that redemptive violence was justifiable and even necessary. In particular, Mazzini's doctrine informed the scheme of slave liberation of the American terrorist John Brown. Ironically, Brown's martyrdom at Harpers Ferry, which precipitated the Civil War, became possible only because his plan for slaves to rise up and show their character did not transpire: in other words, one element of Mazzini's calculus for holy guerilla warfare failed in America's road to civil war, causing another element of Mazzini's calculus to succeed.

²⁰ Ruchames, *John Brown Reader*, p. 218; Sanborn, *John Brown*, p. 137; Redpath, *Public Life*, pp. 59-60; Oates, *To Purge This Land*, pp. 62-3; Boyer, *Legend*, p. 445; Paul Finkelman, 'Manufacturing Martyrdom: The Antislavery Response to John Brown's Raid', in idem (ed.), *His Soul*, pp. 41-66, at pp. 42, 43.

Mazzini's relationship through the warfare of John Brown to the Civil War is an under-appreciated aspect not only of his influence in nineteenth-century America but also of the Atlantic dimensions of the American sectional crisis: in an age of democratic civil wars on both sides of the Atlantic, the violence of Kansas, Harpers Ferry, and then the Civil War itself together constituted something of an American 1848. As a reflection of this interpretation, it is worth recalling President Lincoln's explanation of the circumstances he commemorated at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in 1863, the site of the bloodiest three days in American history and the turning point of the war. In his dedication of the battleground, Lincoln explained the ongoing national conflict as a struggle over the American proposition that 'government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth'. This phrase is customarily considered a hallmark American epigram. But Lincoln here echoed the words of Giuseppe Mazzini, who wrote as early as 1833 that Young Italy sought revolution 'in the name of the people, for the people, and by the people'. Lincoln's choice of words, like John Brown's revolutionary violence, testifies to an American dimension of Mazzini's project of democratic nationalism. Two centuries since Mazzini's birth, his countenance of violence to build nations and spread democracy resonates powerfully in the United States.²¹

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²¹ Abraham Lincoln, 'Address at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania', in Fehrenbacher (ed.), *Abraham Lincoln*, p. 536; Rossi, *Image of America*, p. 135.