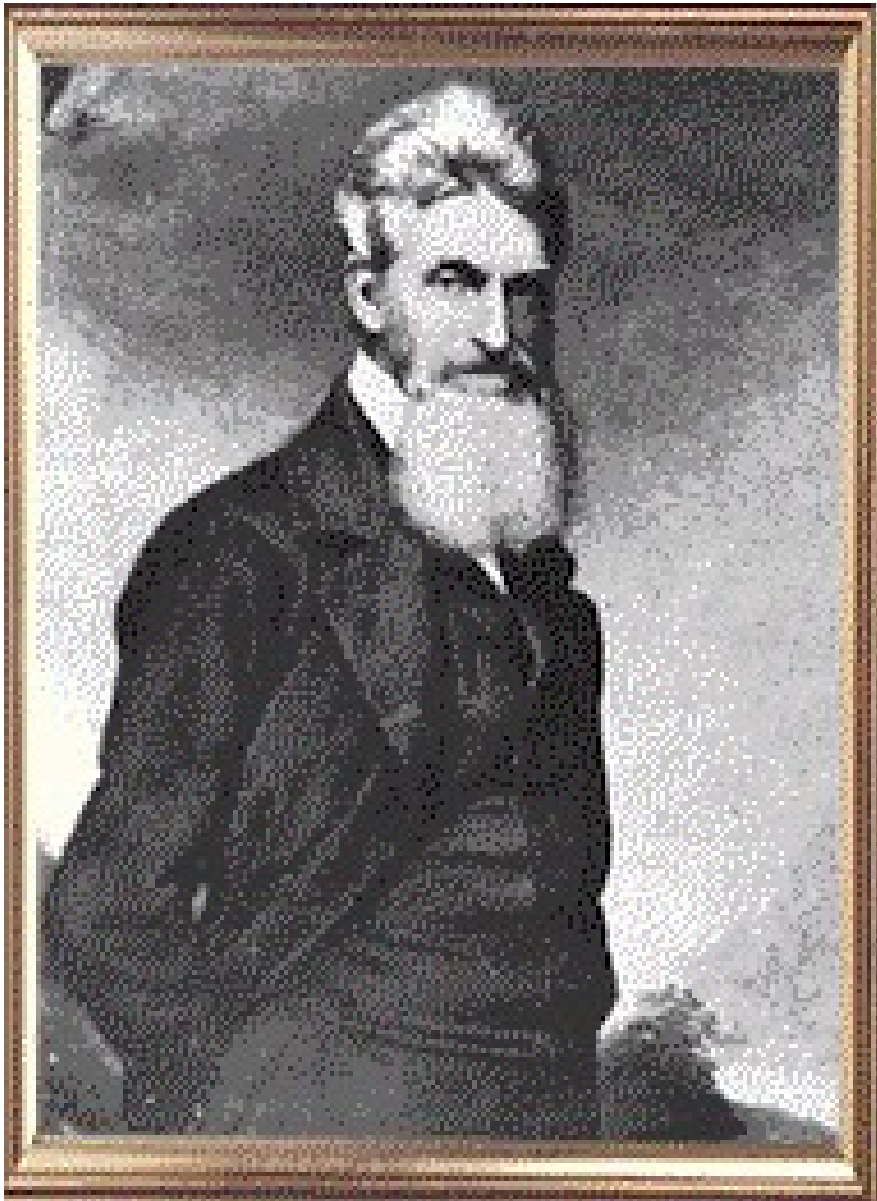


# John Brown: Entrepreneur and Abolitionist



John Brown struggled throughout his life as a businessman, living near the poverty level. Few influential historical figures have failed so miserably at so many different pursuits, says American studies professor and historian David S. Reynolds.

Brown was a tanner, lumber dealer, wool distributor, horse breeder, cattle trader, and real estate, speculator. Actually astute in real estate speculation, Brown would have become

very wealthy had he retained ownership of the lands that he bought, however, the economy tanked in 1837 plunging the country into a five-year depression. Brown eventually declared bankruptcy and was forced to relinquish his property.

Although a good farmer, he was a terrible business manager. For example, when he operated his wool company, he ignored market conditions and priced his product erratically, and his account books were in terrible shape, says professor Reynolds, author of *John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War and Seeded Slavery*.

Some of the problems that contributed to Brown's failure as an entrepreneur were outside his control, but the issues that likely helped sabotage his success were the conflict caused by his need to support a large family versus his philosophical and religious morals.

Brown, a strict Calvinist, had principles which were not compatible with the mindset necessary for entrepreneurial success. In fact, making a lot of money clashed with his spiritual ideals. Brown firmly believed in the way of life of a bygone era, where people lived simply, subsisting from the land.

But Brown would later use his charisma and entrepreneurial talent to raise funds from a group of wealthy backers to fund his abolition work; work which would become his sole focus. Ironically, after his capture, and subsequent execution, his large family was left impoverished.

John Brown, an idealistic dreamer with unwavering lofty goals, never learned how to merge his talent and values to achieve a healthy and successful balance in the business world.

## References

<http://www.booktv.org/Program/5816/John+Brown+Abolitionist.asp>  
Phone interview with Professor Reynolds October 18, 2010.

