



Secret Six: The True Tale of the Men Who Conspired with John Brown

Edward J. Jr. Renehan

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Most Americans know that John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia - a raid he believed would ignite a bloody slave revolution - was one of the events that sparked the Civil War. But very few know the story of how Brown was covertly aided by a circle of prosperous and privileged Northeasterners who supplied him with money and weapons, and, before the raid, even hid him in their homes while authorities sought Brown on a murder charge. These men called themselves the Secret Six. The Secret Six included Thomas Wentworth Higginson, minister, author, and editor of the Atlantic Monthly; Samuel Howe, world-famous physician; Theodore Parker, the Unitarian minister whose rhetoric helped shape Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; Franklin Sanborn, an educator and close friend of Emerson and Thoreau; and the immensely wealthy Gerrit Smith and George Luther Stearns. The existence of the Six has been known to scholars, but there has never been a book devoted to them. Now, drawing on archives from Boston to Kansas, Edward J. Renehan, Jr., has created a vivid portrait of this unlikely cabal, showing how six pillars of the establishment came to believe that armed conflict was necessary in order to purge the United States of a government-sanctioned evil, slavery. The messianic zealot Brown - also portrayed - streaked across their path like a meteor. Renehan traces how the Six became involved with Brown, and how their lives were forever changed by the events at Harpers Ferry and the war they helped to start.

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