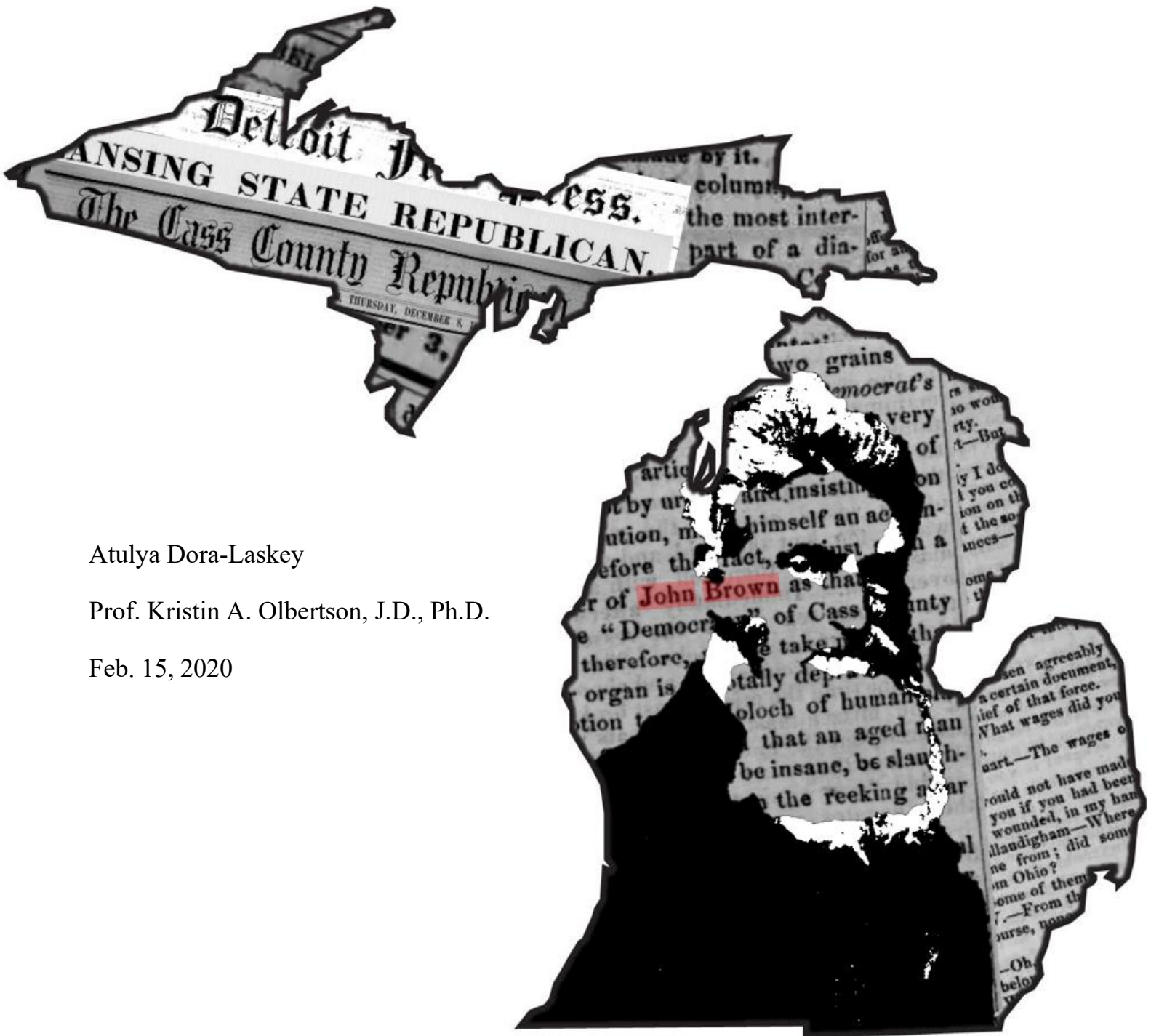


# Sometimes Crazy, Sometimes Captain, and Sometimes Old:

## Initial Reactions to John Brown from Michigan Newspapers

(October 18, 1859 - December 2, 1859)



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The year is 1859, and abolitionist John Brown has just attempted to free enslaved people by starting an uprising at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. With the entire United States just two years from erupting into the Civil War, how does Michigan react to one of the most politically divisive events in American history? I will analyze the initial partisan coverage towards John Brown in the time between his infamous attempted insurrection for enslaved people to his execution a month and a half later using articles from three Michigan-area newspapers with diverse political underpinnings and contextualizing these findings with Michigan history, in order to unpack partisan language, operations, and motives in the antebellum north. The papers chosen for this analysis are the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Lansing State Republican*, and the *Cass County Republican*. Northern papers sympathetic to the Democratic Party such as the *Detroit Free Press* were mostly unified on their position that John Brown was representative of the Republican party, but the analysis finds that northern Republican papers were sometimes in unstated, yet clear disagreement with each other. Moderate Republican newspapers such as the *Lansing State Republican* took every effort possible to distance the Republican party away from Brown, while more radical Republican newspapers such as the *Cass County Republican* instead leaned towards heavily sympathizing with Brown. By analyzing these Michigan papers we can learn how Democrats and Republicans resorted to timeless political maneuvers, which can in turn better help contextualize the partisan news coverage that we find ourselves saturated with now.