

# Abolition

## Overview:

Abolition was the movement in opposition to slavery, often **demanding immediate, uncompensated emancipation of all slaves**, meaning slaves should be freed immediately and their “masters” should not be paid for losing their labor (many slave owners considered slaves property). Abolition was generally considered radical, and there were only a few devoted abolitionists before the Civil War. Almost all abolitionists advocated legal, but not social equality for blacks. Many abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, were extremely vocal and helped to make slavery a national issue, using newspapers, pamphlets, and speeches to speak out against slavery and inform others of its evils.

## Historical Context:

When Eli Whitney invented the **cotton gin** in 1793, he thought it would reduce slavery by reducing the number of people needed to process cotton. Unfortunately his invention increased slavery because it allowed plantation owners to increase the amount of cotton they planted, requiring more labor. **The Southern economy became more reliant on slavery, while the Northern economy was based industry and on free, wage labor** (paying people wages).

The abolitionist movement in the U.S. was largely an outgrowth of **the Second Great Awakening** of the early nineteenth century. As religious devotion and church membership increased, many Christians realized that slavery was contrary to Christianity--that **it went against the beliefs of Christians and was morally wrong**. In addition, as society modernized during the Industrial Revolution, Northerners saw slavery as something that was outdated and unnecessary in a modern economy.

## Historical Significance:

The abolitionist movement greatly affected Antebellum America (America before the Civil War in the 1860s) by

- Increasing **sectional conflict** between the North and the South as they continued to argue over the expansion and existence of slavery, ultimately leading to the Civil War
- **Giving women and African Americans opportunities to have a voice and be more active and influential** in social and political debates. Women and African Americans could not vote, but they could still influence politics through organizations and activism.
- **Encouraging other reform movements**, as people began to think about other social inequalities that should be fixed

## Key Publishing:

**The Liberator:** The Liberator was an anti-slavery newspaper published by William Lloyd Garrison and Isaac Knapp beginning in 1831. Its bitter attacks on slavery and slaveowners, as well as its articles and speeches using arguments based on morality to advocate immediate emancipation made it one of the most persuasive periodicals in the United States at the time.

## Organizations:

**American Antislavery Society:** The American Antislavery Society was an organization in opposition to slavery founded in 1833. In 1840, issues such as the role of women in the abolitionist movement, and role of abolitionists as a political party led to the division of the organization into the American Antislavery Society and Foreign Antislavery Society. Because the organization never had control over the many local antislavery societies, its division did not greatly damage abolitionism.

**American Colonization Society:** Many people opposed to slavery suggested sending slaves to Africa: Thomas Jefferson supported this idea in the early 1800s. In 1820 the American Colonization Society, supported by Abraham Lincoln, Henry Clay and James Monroe, established the colony (now country) of Liberia in West Africa as a refuge for freed slaves. Many abolitionists felt free blacks and whites could not live together peacefully. However, by this point in history, most slaves in America had been born in America, not Africa.

## Key Events:

**Nat Turner's Insurrection:** Turner was a slave who became convinced that he was chosen by God to lead his people to freedom. In Virginia in 1831, Turner led about 70 free and enslaved blacks into a revolt against

slave owners. They killed about 55 whites and freed numerous slaves before the rebellion was put down. Turner was eventually caught and killed, and whites responded by killing 120 blacks and passing stricter slave laws. Some states began debating abolishing slavery to avoid future rebellions.

**Creole affair:** The Creole Affair was an uprising by a 128 slaves who killed the captain of the slave ship *The Creole*, took control of the ship and sailed for Bahamas, where they became free under British law. This incident increased abolitionist action in the North while angering pro-slavery southerners and helped end the international slave trade.

#### **Key Leaders:**

**William Lloyd Garrison:** William Lloyd Garrison was a radical who founded *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper, in Boston in 1831. He advocated immediate, uncompensated emancipation and even civil equality for blacks. Garrison thought whites and blacks were equal, which was considered very radical at the time.

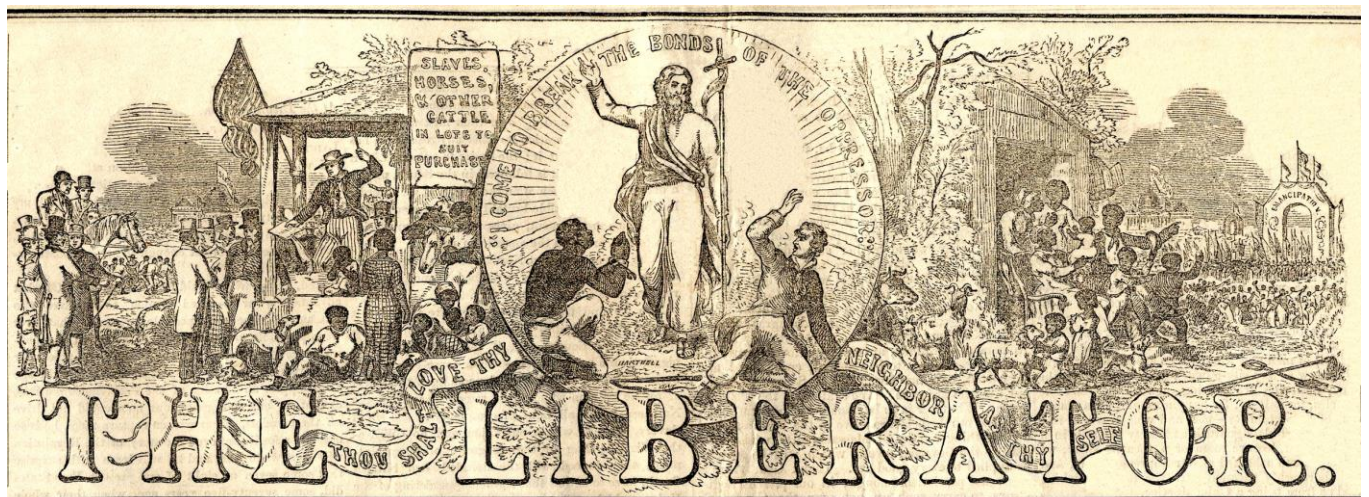
**Grimké sisters:** Angelina and Sarah Grimké were sisters from slave owning families who realized the slavery went against Christian beliefs. They began speaking out against slavery and later freed their own family's slaves.


**Frederick Douglass:** Douglass was an escaped slave who became a powerful abolitionist orator (public speaker). He captured his audiences with descriptions of his life as a slave. He also published a newspaper, the *North Star*, in the early 1830s. Douglass encouraged slaves to escape as he did and motivated many northerners to oppose slavery.

**Sojourner Truth:** Sojourner Truth was a runaway slave who became an influential figure in both women's societies and the abolitionist movement. In spite of her illiteracy, she traveled widely through New England and the Midwest, making speeches against sex discrimination, Godlessness, and slavery.


**Harriet Tubman:** Tubman was a black woman who, after escaping from slavery in 1849, made 19 journeys back into the South to help as many as 300 other slaves escape. She was the most famous leader of the Underground Railroad. Because of her efforts to lead her people to freedom, Tubman was known as "Moses" among blacks.

**Harriet Beecher Stowe-** Wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an anti-slavery novel that quickly became a bestseller and motivated many to join the abolitionist cause by showing people the many horrors of slavery.






A is an Abolitionist—  
A man who wants to free  
The wretched slave—and give to all  
An equal liberty.




B is a Brother with a skin  
Of somewhat darker hue,  
But in our Heavenly Father's sight,  
He is as dear as you.

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C is the Cotton-field, to which  
This injured brother's driven,  
When, as the white man's *slave*, he toils  
From early morn till even.



D is the Driver, cold and stern,  
Who follows, whip in hand,  
To punish those who dare to rest,  
Or disobey command.

Pages from an abolitionist book for children. Abolitionists sought to convince young and old of the evils of slavery.



These woodcuts of a chained and pleading slave, Am I Not a Man and a Brother? (a) and Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?, accompanied abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier's antislavery poem, "Our Countrymen in Chains." Abolitionists wanted Americans to see that slaves were not property, but were fellow men and women who needed their help.