

The Abolition Movement in America

1831—*The Liberator*

Anti-slavery societies were active in the North by the 1780's, but during the years that followed, the solutions they offered to slavery varied widely. At first, public sentiment was generally that slavery would die out by itself. Then, as cotton planting grew in the South, so did the demand for slaves. By the 1830's a new group of radical abolitionists became active. In 1831 one of them, William Lloyd Garrison, founded *The Liberator* in Boston. In his first edition of *The Liberator*, Garrison made this famous pledge:

I am aware, that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire, to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife

from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen; —but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD. [*The Liberator*, Vol. I, No. 1, January 1, 1831]

GLOSSARY **equivocate**—speak uncertainly
 extricate—set free, get out
 moderation—avoiding extremes

ravisher—rapist
uncompromising—inflexible, rigid

1. Explain how William Lloyd Garrison and other *abolitionists* would have been viewed in the South and in their territories in the West that wanted to expand slavery.
2. What type of dangers do you think *abolitionists* faced?
3. What are four adjectives that you would use to describe William Lloyd Garrison and people like him?
4. Now, list four adjectives you would use to describe William Lloyd Garrison IF YOU DISAGREED with his opinions about slavery.
5. Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with William Lloyd Garrison's opinion, explain how the 1st *amendment* made this quote possible.

1850 – Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass became the voice of the anti-slavery movement in America. He was born into slavery in Maryland, but eventually escaped as a young man. He did odd jobs in the North to survive and taught himself how to read and write so that he could better his life. After attending a few abolitionist meetings, Douglass was moved to speak and share his personal stories of being a slave. Even after he became a well-known and well-respected speaker for the abolitionists cause, Douglass still lived in fear of being returned to slavery by slave catchers in the North.

More than twenty years of my life were consumed in a state of slavery. . . . A master is one (to speak in the vocabulary of the Southern States) who claims and exercises a right of property in the person of a fellow man. This he does with the force of the law and the sanction of Southern religion. The law gives the master absolute power over the slave. He may work him, flog him, hire him out, sell him, and in certain contingencies, *kill* him, with perfect impunity. The slave is a human being, divested of all rights—reduced to the level of a brute—a mere “chattel” in the eye of the law—placed beyond the circle of human brotherhood—cut off from his kind—his name . . . is impiously inserted in a *master’s ledger*, with horses, sheep and swine. In law, the slave has no wife, no children, no country, and no home. He can own nothing, possess nothing, acquire

nothing, but what must belong to another. To eat the fruit of his own toil, to clothe his person with the work of his own hands, is considered stealing. He toils that another may reap the fruit; he is industrious that another may live in idleness; he eats unbolted meal, that another may ride in ease and splendor abroad; he lives in ignorance, that another may be educated; he is abused, that another may be exalted; he rests his toil-worn limbs on the cold, damp ground, that another may repose on the softest pillow; he is clad in coarse and tattered raiment, that another may be arrayed in purple and fine linen; he is sheltered only by the wretched hovel, that a master may dwell in a magnificent mansion; and to this condition he is bound down as by an arm of iron. [Frederick Douglass lecture in Rochester, New York, December 1, 1850]

Glossary

abuse—treat badly
array—dress
brute—animal
chattel—piece of property
clad—clothed
consume—use up
contingency—circumstance
divest—deprive, take away
exalt—raise in position
flog—beat, whip
hovel—small, miserable dwelling
impiously—without reverence for God
impunity—freedom from punishment

industrious—hard-working
ledger—account book
magnificent—grand, outstanding
mansion—large, stately house
raiment—clothes
sanction—approval
splendor—grandeur, fine appearance
stint—limit, restrict
tattered—torn, ragged
toil-worn—tired from work
unbolted—not sifted
wretched—poor, shabby

1. Explain why people would have listened to what Frederick Douglass had to say. What made him a powerful voice in the abolition movement?
2. Do you think Douglass was treated with respect by the predominately white audiences he spoke to? Explain.