

LESSON 4

Who Fought to End Slavery? Meet the Abolitionists

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FOR ALL ITS WEAKNESSES and divisions, the abolition movement was perhaps the most significant social movement in U.S. history: an anti-racist movement, a labor movement, a feminist movement, a free speech movement, an antiwar movement. The secession of Southern states in response to Abraham Lincoln's election, which triggered the Civil War, is inexplicable without the fear — and sometimes paranoia — the abolition movement kindled in the Southern imagination. And yet our textbooks cover this essential social movement in a few cursory pages, at best. In curricula and mainstream media, social progress is assigned to Great

Men. Young people fail to learn the lesson they need so desperately in order to recognize their own potential power today: Throughout history, social movements have made the world a better place — more democratic, more equal, more just.

The purpose of the abolitionist mixer is to familiarize students with the stories of famous and lesser-known abolitionists and introduce them to a number of the individuals and themes they encounter both in the role play “If There Is No Struggle...”: Teaching a People's History of the Abolition Movement” and the reading “A People's History of the Abolition Movement.”

Materials Needed

- Copies of “Abolitionist Mixer: Questions” (Handout 4-A) for every student.
- “Mixer Roles” (Handout 4-B), cut up. One for every student in the class.*
- Blank nametags. Enough for every student in the class.
- Copies of “A People's History of the Abolition Movement” (Handout 4-C) for every student.



William Cooper Nell, William Lloyd Garrison, and Harriet Forten Purvis are a few of the abolitionists featured in the role play.

Time Required

One class period for the mixer. Additional time to discuss “A People’s History of the Abolition Movement.”

Suggested Procedure

1. Explain to students that they are going to do an activity about the abolitionist movement — one of the largest social movements in the history of the United States. Distribute one mixer role and a blank nametag to each student in the class. There are 28 roles, so in some classes some students will be assigned the same historical characters. In smaller classes, you do not have to use all the roles in order to have a successful mixer. The roles are ordered so including at least the first eight will allow any small class to have a diverse group of abolitionists.
2. Have students fill out their nametags using the name of the individual they are assigned. Tell students that in this activity you would like each of them to attempt to become these people from history. Ask students to read their roles several times and to memorize as much of the information as possible. Encourage them to underline key points. Sometimes it helps if students turn over their roles and list three or four facts about their characters that they think are most important.
3. Distribute a copy of the “Abolitionist Mixer: Questions” (Handout 4–A) to every student. Explain their assignment: Students should circulate through the classroom, meeting other abolitionists. They should use the questions on the sheet as a guide to talk with others about their lives and to complete the questions as fully as possible. They must use a different individual to answer each of the eight questions. Ask students to read these and to check those questions that they might be able to help answer in the mixer.
4. It’s helpful to lay out a few rules for the mixer:
 - 1) Students assigned the same person may not meet themselves.
 - 2) No to beehives, yes to speed dating — in other words we want students to engage with each other one on one and spend some time getting to know the person they are with before moving on to the next. We don’t want them to clump together, which can be intimidating for some students to enter.
- 3) Tell students that it’s not a race — the aim is for students to spend time hearing each other’s stories, not just hurriedly scribbling down answers to the different questions. Students may also not show their roles to anyone; this is a conversation-based activity. Sometimes students will try to adopt accents, in an attempt to sound like the individual they are portraying. Encourage them not to do this, as it can end up promoting stereotypes.
5. Ask students to stand up and begin to circulate throughout the class to meet one another and to fill out responses. Sometimes to get them out of their seat it’s helpful to require that the first person they talk to is sitting across the room from them.
6. Before discussing the mixer as a class, it’s helpful to ask students to write answers to a few reflection questions to help them collect their thoughts and calm things down a bit. Here are some possible questions:
 - Out of all the people you met, whose story did you find most interesting. Why?
 - Why do you think that you have not heard of more of these individuals?
 - How much credit should these individuals get for ending slavery?
7. Afterward, ask students to share some of their findings with the whole class. This needn’t be exhaustive, as students will learn a lot more about these issues when they read about the abolitionists later on. Beyond the reflection questions students wrote on, here are a few questions to extend the discussion:
 - Beyond your own character, whose story stuck out to you the most? Why?
 - What were some of the different ways abolitionists attempted to end slavery?
 - What were some of the different points of view you encountered for how to end slavery?

8. If students have gone through Lesson 3 (“If There Is No Struggle. . .”) you might ask them to recall some of the major divisions in the abolitionist movement. Write these on the board. Afterward, ask them:
- What abolitionists in the mixer fell on different sides of these debates? (Write their names on the board.)
 - Do you notice any trends?
 - Are there certain debates that Black abolitionists fell mostly to one side of?
 - What about male or female abolitionists? Why do they think that this would be the case?

A People’s History of the Abolition Movement

9. As a follow-up, assign “A People’s History of the Abolition Movement” (Handout 4–C) by William Loren Katz and James Brewer Stewart. The reading is long, which can be difficult for some students, but it is a crucial primer on the movement. Depending on your student population, you may want to modify the suggestions below and jigsaw the six sections of the reading.
10. Ask students to complete a “talk-back” journal with the reading. They should locate at least five passages from the reading that they found interesting, important, surprising, moving, confusing, or outrageous. They should write out each quote and their detailed reaction to it. If you are planning to finish this unit of study by asking students to write an essay on “who freed the slaves?” you might ask them to look for passages that they could use as evidence for their essay. If not, you might ask students to find material that they can connect with information they learned in the mixer, events that relate somehow to their own lives or events going on today. Also encourage students to raise at least two

questions that they would like to discuss with the rest of the class.

11. In addition to students’ own questions, here are some questions for further discussion or writing:
- What effect did David Walker’s *Appeal* have on enslaved people, slave owners, and on white abolitionists?
 - What were some of the early campaigns and strategies the abolitionists used to fight slavery? How effective were these campaigns?
 - How did people — particularly people in positions of power — respond to the early abolitionist campaigns?
 - How did the violence of the late 1830s challenge the abolitionists’ early ideas? What were the different ideas and strategies that the abolitionist movement adopted after the 1830s?
 - What were the different ways that Black abolitionists pushed the movement further in the 1840s?
 - What were the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the *Dred Scott* decision? Why were they important turning points for the movement?
 - Who was John Brown? What did he do? Do you agree with his actions?

In addition, if students have completed Lesson 3 (“If There Is No Struggle. . .”) this reading will tell them how the debates they simulated in the classroom played out in real life. You might ask them to compare the decisions that they made as a class to the decisions of actual abolitionists. Students should note that some of these decisions split the movement and write down the names and reasons of abolitionists who fell on either side. It’s particularly useful to have students think about and discuss times when their class came to a different conclusion from the real abolitionists and why they think that was.

* Some of the roles have been adapted from the “Unsung Heroes” teaching activity by Bill Bigelow (<https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/teaching-about-unsung-heroes/>)

Abolitionist Mixer: Questions

1. Find someone who has an opinion about whether the abolitionist movement should support women's rights. Who are they? Why do they think this?
2. Find someone who supports the use of violence in self-defense or to end slavery. Who are they? Why do they think violence is necessary or what actions did they take?
3. Find someone who does not support the use of violence to end slavery. Who are they? What nonviolent actions did they take?
4. Find someone who took part in the Underground Railroad. Who are they? What actions did they take to end slavery?
5. Find someone who escaped slavery. What is their story?
6. Find someone who was threatened, imprisoned, injured, or murdered for their attempts to end slavery or fight racism. What is their story?
7. Find someone who wrote an influential book, essay, or published a newspaper. What was the name of the publication? Why was it influential?
8. Find someone who played a role in the Civil War. Who are they? What was their experience?

Mixer Roles

Angelina Grimké

I was the daughter of a South Carolina plantation owner who enslaved people. I saw firsthand the horrors of slavery. As I grew older and more involved in the Presbyterian Church, I began questioning how such a system could exist under God's great banner of heaven. My sister, Sarah, introduced me to the ideas of Quakerism, and I began talking to others in the Presbyterian Church about nonviolence, peace, and abolition. They responded by expelling me from the church. So I left South Carolina. I left my only home and moved to Pennsylvania, where I converted to Quakerism, a religion that believes in peace and nonviolence. As an abolitionist, I questioned why many Northerners continued to buy products made with raw materials from the South — all with the labor of people who were enslaved. I toured throughout the North giving speeches against slavery and eventually for women's rights. Ministers in Massachusetts tried to bar women from speaking from their pulpits and I urged abolitionists to fight against this ban. I knew that if we surrendered the right to speak in public, women would be shamed into silence and would not be able to fight for any cause.

John Brown

People have called me crazy because I, a white man, gave up my life in the cause to free Black slaves. Unlike most Northern abolitionists, who advocated a peaceful resistance to slavery, I believed that the only way to defeat this oppressive system was through violent insurrection. I was fed up with the talk of antislavery when what was really needed was action. I fought in what was known as "Bloody Kansas," to make sure that Kansas did not enter the United States as a state that allowed slavery. And it's true: I killed many people there. But it was a just cause, and I took no pleasure in killing. I'm most famous for leading 22 men, Black and white, to attack the U.S. arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Utilizing the vast knowledge of abolitionist Harriet Tubman, I developed a plan to capture 100,000 muskets and rifles and distribute them to local people held in slavery. In one sense, my mission failed, because we were captured, I was imprisoned, and finally executed. But I am convinced that my actions hastened the day of freedom for Black people suffering in slavery.

David Ruggles

When I was 17, I moved to New York City from Connecticut. Six years later, in 1834, I opened my own bookshop. I was the first Black bookseller and operated the first Black lending library in the nation. My magazine, the *Mirror of Liberty*, was the first periodical published by an African American. I used my bookstore and my magazine to promote abolitionism. But I wasn't just a bookseller — I also took action. From 1835 to 1838, I was active in the Underground Railroad. I helped form the New York Committee of Vigilance that helped escaped slaves who had fled the South. We were involved in more than 300 cases in 1836 alone and later took on the case of Frederick Douglass. I also sparked one of the first interracial “sit-ins” in history when in 1841 I refused to sit in the “colored-only” sections of steamboats and railway cars operating in Massachusetts. Because New York's economy depended directly or indirectly on slavery, I was often the target of mob violence. My store was burned down three times; I was beaten in jail twice and once nearly kidnapped to be sold into slavery. Yet I remained a committed fighter for racial justice.

William Lloyd Garrison

I joined the antislavery movement at the age of 25. You may have heard about me because I was the editor of the most widely read abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*. In 1833, I helped found the American Anti-Slavery Society, a coalition of abolitionists from 10 states that demanded “immediate emancipation” of enslaved people in the United States. Because slavery was so violent, I felt that we should remain nonviolent and advocated passive resistance to slavery. I also argued that we should not align ourselves with any political party and that we should champion women's rights. An injustice to one person is an injustice to all people. On July 4, 1844, I publicly burned a copy of the U.S. Constitution. Referring to its compromises on slavery, I declared it “a Covenant with Death, an Agreement with Hell.” As our movement grew in size, the reaction from supporters of slavery in both the Southern and Northern states was increasingly violent. I woke one morning to find a noose on my front lawn. Later, I was almost killed when a racist mob attacked me. Some Southern states even offered a reward for my capture “dead or alive.” But I refused to give up.

Harriet Forten Purvis

I've been praised for being exceptionally lady-like with manners like a "Southern belle," but don't let that description fool you. I have enough spirit to tackle a dozen men. I was raised in a wealthy free Black family in Philadelphia. My dad helped found a private school that I attended with my siblings. I learned foreign languages, music, literature, and many other subjects. My parents were active abolitionists and I continued in their footsteps. My home was a hot spot on the Underground Railroad, and my husband and I helped more than 9,000 enslaved Blacks make their way to freedom. I regularly threw dinner parties and fundraisers at our home to raise money for abolitionist causes. I also helped run a sewing school to help poorer Black women earn income. In addition, with my mom and my sister, I helped found the first biracial women's abolition group, the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, with white abolitionists such as Lucretia Mott. A white mob burned down our meeting place, but we persevered. Together we helped launch a citywide boycott of goods such as cotton and food products that had been farmed using enslaved labor. I worked not just for abolition, but also for desegregation in Philadelphia, and for women's voting rights, but faced regular violence and threats because of it.

Harriet Tubman

As a child living in slavery in Maryland, I was beaten and whipped by many enslavers. I was religious at an early age and I began experiencing visions that guided me throughout my life, which I considered signs from God. I had determined that it was not God's will for me to live out my life in slavery, and so I decided that I would escape to freedom, no matter what it took. In 1849, I finally escaped to Philadelphia. After that, I returned to free my family, and other enslaved people seeking freedom. I made 19 trips on the Underground Railroad and rescued more than 70 enslaved people, earning me the nickname Moses. There are other things about me that you may not have heard. I worked with the radical abolitionist John Brown, helping him recruit men to fight during his raid on Harpers Ferry. I was not troubled by his use of violence to end the violent institution of slavery. In fact, during the Civil War I served as an armed scout and a spy and I was the first woman to lead an armed expedition, which burned down plantations and liberated more than 700 people from slavery.

Harry Jarvis

When the Civil War started, I managed to sneak away from my so-called master. He was well known as the meanest man on the entire Eastern Shore. I hid in forests and walked many miles until I found "Fortress Monroe," which the Union soldiers had taken over. I went straight up to General Butler and asked him to let me enlist, but he said it wasn't a Black man's war. I told him it would be a Black man's war before they got through. Two years later, I successfully enlisted in the 54th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, one of the Union Army's first Black regiments. Yes, I know that Lincoln said it wasn't a war to free people who were enslaved. But that's why we fought. And in the end the war did free enslaved people, despite what Lincoln said. When the 54th fought courageously at Fort Wagner, we were praised for our bravery during battle. Our actions encouraged further enlistment and mobilization of Black troops. Although half of our regiment died, we died heroes. No one drafted us. We didn't have to go like lots of white people. We chose to risk our lives for the freedom of others.

Lucretia Mott

As a teacher in New York, I was shocked to find out that male teachers were paid three times more than women. I met my husband, who was also a teacher, and we moved to Philadelphia. In 1811, I joined the Quaker ministry. The Quakers fought slavery nonviolently. We boycotted products made with the labor of enslaved people. I brought together Black and white women to form the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and increasingly played a prominent role in the national organization, the American Anti-Slavery Society. I also opened my home to runaways escaping on the Underground Railroad. In 1840, I was sent as a delegate to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London and was appalled when I, and other female delegates, were not allowed to participate because we were women. But there I met Elizabeth Cady Stanton and together we made plans to hold the first gathering for women's rights in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. When slavery was abolished, African American men were granted the rights of citizenship, but women were not. This led some white women, like Stanton, to oppose the granting of these rights to Black men. I grew increasingly uncomfortable with the racist rhetoric Stanton used to justify her positions and resigned from the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1868.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Although I am mostly known for supporting women's suffrage, early in my career I fought against slavery. I helped organize the gathering of more than 400,000 signatures asking for legislation to end slavery — half of the signatures were by women. But I became frustrated by the way even abolitionists treated women. In 1840, at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, male delegates voted that women should not be allowed to participate, even though we had come as the elected delegates of abolitionist societies in the United States. I came to see that white women in America were themselves treated like we were enslaved. And I began to work for women's rights as well. With Lucretia Mott, I organized the Seneca Falls Conference, the first gathering of women in the United States to demand rights for women. We produced the Declaration of Sentiments expressing our grievances as women and urging needed social changes: guaranteeing women's right to vote, the right to own property, and the right to get a divorce. After the Civil War, I hoped that the government would extend the rights of citizenship to both African Americans and white women, but when it became clear that in the 14th and 15th amendments only Black men would be granted those rights, I opposed their passage.

Sojourner Truth

My name is one that I chose for myself, because I declared that I would travel in truth for the rest of my days on this Earth. In 1806, when I was 9 years old, I was sold at an auction with a flock of sheep for \$100. The man who bought me was awful. He raped and beat me daily. In 1826, at age 29, I finally escaped to freedom but had to leave my children behind. I later went to court to recover my son and became one of the first Black women ever to go to court against a white man and win. I became a Methodist and traveled around preaching about abolition, women's rights, religious tolerance, and nonviolence. 1850 was a big year for me. My book, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*, was published; I purchased a home; and I spoke at the first National Women's Rights Convention. That speech became known as "Ain't I a Woman?" and launched me even further into my lifelong devotion to end both slavery and the mistreatment of women. Over the next decade, I spoke before hundreds of audiences about these issues. During the Civil War, I helped recruit Black troops for the Union Army.

David Walker

I was born in North Carolina to a free mother and an enslaved father. There is no way to describe the horrors that I witnessed as a young boy, but it is those memories that made me decide to devote my life to ending slavery. I quickly became known as an outspoken Black activist who demanded the immediate and unconditional end of slavery. Being an Evangelical Christian gave me the power to call out the hypocrisy of white Christians who justified “owning” other human beings. I became a leader in the Black community of Boston, partly because I wrote what became one of the most radical and influential anti-slavery documents, *An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. The goal of the *Appeal* was to instill pride in Black readers and give hope that change would come someday. My *Appeal* also changed the view of many white abolitionists who thought slavery should end gradually. However, I began receiving death threats shortly after the *Appeal* was published. I died in Boston the next year and many people believe that I was poisoned.

Frederick Douglass

I was born into a life of slavery. Separated from my mother, I was raised by my grandparents. The wife of my enslaver broke the rules and taught me how to read and write. At the age of 16, I was sent to work for Edward Covey, a poor farmer known as a “slave breaker.” He whipped me regularly. Eventually, I fought back and Covey never whipped me again. In 1838, I escaped to freedom by pretending to be a sailor. I settled in Massachusetts, where I joined a Black church and began attending abolitionist meetings. At those meetings, other activists encouraged me to tell my story. In 1845, my autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, was published and became an international best seller. I also published my own newspaper, the *North Star*. I rejected the pacifism of many white abolitionists and called on Blacks to defend themselves with guns if necessary against slave catchers. Throughout my life, I fought for equal treatment of all people, including women. I was the only African American at the first women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls. I would unite with anybody for justice. Without struggle, there can be no progress.

William Wells Brown

I was born in bondage in Lexington, Kentucky. While still a boy, I was hired out to the captain of a St. Louis steamboat in the booming Mississippi River trade. I tried many times to escape with my mother, but we were caught. She was shipped south to New Orleans and I never saw her again. I kept trying, though, and eventually escaped. I adopted the name of a Quaker, Wells Brown, who aided me when I was a runaway. I moved to Buffalo and joined the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1836. I gave lectures at my home, spoke at abolitionist gatherings, and traveled to Cuba and Haiti to investigate the possibility of emigrating there with other formerly enslaved people. In the 1840s I used my skills as a steamboat operator as a conductor for the Underground Railroad. I also participated in armed attempts to prevent slave catchers from collecting their “property” in the North. Some abolitionists opposed this, saying we must remain nonviolent. Although I was a longtime supporter of nonviolent tactics, I felt like the new Fugitive Slave Law gave us no choice; we couldn’t allow the slave owners to come into our communities and harm free people.

Elijah Lovejoy

I opposed slavery on moral and religious grounds. I became the pastor of the Presbyterian Church in St. Louis in 1834. I started a religious newspaper, the *St. Louis Observer*. After being converted to abolitionism through conversations with a local Anti-Slavery Society organizer I started to use my newspaper to advocate against slavery. In 1836, I published a full account of the lynching of an African American in St. Louis and the subsequent trial that acquitted the mob leaders. This critical report enraged some of the locals and an angry mob destroyed my printing press. Unable to publish my newspaper in St. Louis, I moved to Alton, Illinois. I began editing the *Alton Observer* and continued to advocate the end of slavery. Three times my printing press was seized by pro-slavery mobs and thrown into the Mississippi River. Despite repeated threats on my life I continued the fight to spread the word of abolition. Eventually, a mob burned down my office. They brought guns and killed me as I tried to escape the burning building. I was shot dead trying to protect my printing press and the rights of all human beings.

Jermain Wesley Loguen

I was the son of a white slave owner and a woman he enslaved named Cherry, born into slavery in Tennessee. In 1834, I stole my master's horse and escaped to Canada. I moved with my family to Syracuse in 1841, where I taught school and became a licensed preacher of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. I became active in the abolitionist movement and used my house as a major station for the Underground Railroad. I wrote letters to the press openly discussing my activities and asking for donations to assist fugitives. I aided more than 1,500 freedom seekers. The most dramatic case involved a runaway named Jerry, who was arrested under the Fugitive Slave Law. I joined a committee of abolitionists, Black and white, that rescued Jerry and assisted him in escaping to Canada. We used crowbars and a battering ram to break into the jail where Jerry was held. Deputy marshals shot out the window at us, but eventually they realized that the crowd was so large and was so determined that they relented and released Jerry. If the government was willing to use force to capture Black people, it was right for us to use force in response.

Wendell Phillips

As the son of a wealthy white lawyer, I led a relatively privileged life. I graduated from Harvard Law School in 1833. But in 1835, I witnessed abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison being attacked by a mob of several thousand. They stormed the Anti-Slavery office, dragged out Garrison, tied him up and came very close to hanging him. A few men eventually saved Garrison and I became good friends with him. He convinced me to devote my skills to the abolitionist cause. I soon became known as "abolition's Golden Trumpet" because of my skills as a speaker. But public speaking also put me in danger. When I spoke in Cincinnati, a mob threw eggs and charged at me from the audience, and a bottle of explosives was later found in the lobby. I always believed abolitionists should shape politics through public opinion, not violence, but I defended those in the movement like John Brown who chose a different path. During the Civil War, I criticized Lincoln for not committing himself to the abolition of slavery and in 1865 I replaced Garrison as president of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Although I supported women's rights, I believed we needed to fight one war at a time and urged abolitionists to focus on ending slavery first.

Harriet Beecher Stowe

I was born in Connecticut in 1811. My father, Lyman Beecher, was a preacher and a leader in the antislavery movement. My father taught me to hate slavery. In 1836, I married Calvin Stowe. Calvin was a professor who hated slavery as much as I did. We would provide shelter to people who had run away from slavery and who had escaped north to freedom along the Underground Railroad. At the age of 41, I wrote my most famous book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The book followed the lives of people as they were sold into slavery, beaten to death, or separated from their families at slave auctions. My book sold 3,000 copies the first day it was published and there were more copies sold than any other book except the Bible. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was read by so many people that it even scared slave owners. Later on in life, when I met President Lincoln, he said, "So you are the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war." I also campaigned for the expansion of women's rights, arguing, "the position of a married woman . . . is, in many respects, precisely similar to that of the Negro slave."

Solomon Northup

I was born free in upstate New York in 1808, but was captured by slave traders and taken to Louisiana. My book, *12 Years a Slave*, tells the story of my enslavement, but many people don't know about my abolitionist activity after I was freed. I wrote my book to expose the brutal conditions of enslavement. It became so popular — second only to Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* — that I was able to speak across the United States against the horrors of slavery. I also became active in the Underground Railroad, assisting people who had run away from slavery. Moved by the troubling content of my lectures and autobiography, abolitionists in upstate New York and elsewhere began a campaign asking Congress to compensate me for my years in slavery. Abolitionists argued, and I agreed, that my time away from my family and the loss of my liberty was worth many times my "value" as slave property. Later, in the 1850s, other abolitionists broadened the campaign to call for reparations — some form of payment for all people who had once been enslaved. I'm proud of my role in the first campaign for federal reparations.

Thaddeus Stevens

I grew up in poverty but rose to become a lawyer and in 1858 was elected as a representative to the U.S. Congress. I was one of the most powerful congressional representatives in the country, and I never took that power for granted. I use it on behalf of those whose rights have been trampled, those whose hands built this country but remained in shackles. I always fought for the rights of the oppressed, and slavery is the most oppressive part of this society. That's why before becoming a congressman, I built a secret hidden room at my law office where people who escaped slavery could sleep as part of the Underground Railroad. I knew that slave states would never be able to coexist with free states and that to end slavery, it would take a war or revolution across the South. During the Civil War I was the first in Congress to call for arming people who had escaped slavery, arguing they should be welcomed into the Union Army. And after the war, I called for destroying the power of the slave-owning class, stripping them of their estates, and maintaining troops in the South to guarantee real freedom for formerly enslaved people.

Charles Sumner

I was known for my powerful public speaking. In my first major speech as a senator, I spoke for three hours denouncing the Fugitive Slave Law as fundamentally unconstitutional and immoral. In 1854, Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which allowed the Kansas and Nebraska territories to vote to allow slavery. I was furious at this power grab by Southern politicians, so I gave a speech and insulted two of the act's sponsors. The cousin of one of the sponsors came into the Senate and beat me over the head with a metal cane. It took me three years to recover. I became a hero to many Northern abolitionists, who saw the violence as a symbol of how out of control Southerners had become. Later, when enslaved people in Haiti kicked out the French, I led the push to have the United States recognize the new country. During the Civil War, I was a leader of the Radical Republican faction that criticized Lincoln for not making it a war to end slavery. Specializing in foreign affairs, I also worked to ensure the British and the French did not side with the Confederacy.

Robert Smalls

I always loved the water, and Henry McKee, my enslaver, had me work as a dockworker. I learned how to make sails and rig up the ships. During the Civil War I was forced to work on a Confederate military ship. On May 12, 1862, while the white crew went ashore I dressed in a captain's uniform and, with the help of three other enslaved people, steered the ship toward where I knew the Union Navy was. On the way, we stopped nearby to pick up our families. When we finally made it to the Union blockade ship, *USS Onward*, we declared ourselves free and gave the Union soldiers the ship and all that was on board, including six large expensive artillery guns, explosives, and a code book that revealed the Confederacy's secret signals and placement of mines and torpedoes in Charleston Harbor. I was given a reward of \$1,500 and given an officer's commission in the Union Army. After the war, when enslaved people were emancipated, I served five terms in the U.S. Congress, and was, for a time, one of the most powerful political leaders in South Carolina.

William Walker

I was one of the 186,017 Black soldiers who fought in the Civil War after President Lincoln finally opened the Union Army to Blacks in 1863. But Black soldiers were not treated equally. We were used for the heaviest and dirtiest work, digging trenches, hauling logs, loading ammunition, and digging wells for white regiments. On top of that, we were paid less. White privates received \$13 a month while Black privates received only \$10. After being named sergeant of the 3rd South Carolina Volunteer Infantry Regiment, I decided I had had enough of this inequality. I was fighting for freedom and equality and I thought that's what the Union was fighting for, too. I marched my company to my captain's tent and we stacked our guns out in front. We told him that the pay disparity was a breach of our Army contract, and we would lay down our arms until it was rectified. Instead of giving us equal pay, I was court-martialed, tried, convicted, and executed by a firing squad for what they considered "mutiny."

Elizabeth Gloucester

I am a Black woman, born free in Virginia around 1817. When I married Presbyterian minister James Gloucester, we moved to Brooklyn, New York, where I was heavily involved in fundraising for Siloam Presbyterian Church. Our church hosted many abolitionist speakers, such as Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet. John Brown spoke at our church and even stayed at our home. While many of New York's white abolitionists refused to support Brown's efforts to bring armed men into the South to free enslaved people, we gave Brown funds and encouraged him to "do battle with that ugly foe, slavery." Our home and church were also key stops on the Underground Railroad. During the Civil War, I led fundraising efforts for freedmen and Union soldiers. I also helped mobilize other philanthropists to fund the Colored Orphan Asylum in Manhattan and create a new Colored Orphan's Asylum in the free Black community of Weeksville, in Brooklyn. I did all this while raising six children. I was an astute businesswoman. At my death I was estimated to be worth at least \$200,000; the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* stated I was one of the richest women in the world.

Lewis Hayden

I was born in slavery in 1811 in Lexington, Kentucky. In the mid-1830s my first wife and son were sold to U.S. Senator Henry Clay, who then sold them into the Deep South and I never saw them again. I married a second time in 1842 to Harriet Bell. We escaped together on the Underground Railroad in 1844, fleeing to Canada before making our way to Boston. In Massachusetts, our family ran a clothing store where we also held abolitionist meetings and provided refuge for people escaping from slavery as part of the Underground Railroad. I served on the executive board of the Boston Vigilance Committee and worked closely with William Lloyd Garrison. I stored two kegs of gunpowder in our home in case slave catchers ever attempted to capture the people we sheltered. I also raised funds for John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry where he attempted to steal guns and distribute them to nearby slaves. During the Civil War I helped recruit Black soldiers and later served a term in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. As a congressman, I worked to erect a monument to honor Crispus Attucks, a Black man who was the first casualty of the American Revolutionary War.

William Cooper Nell

I was the son of a Massachusetts tailor and Black activist. I thought I was lucky to be born in the North. But as a high school student in Boston, I experienced discrimination when the mayor refused to invite me — the only Black honors student — to a banquet recognizing outstanding seniors. Shortly after, I became politically active and was mentored by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. In the 1840s, while working as the office manager for Garrison's newspaper, I worked to desegregate the Boston railroad and Boston performance halls. But my biggest campaign was a successful decades-long effort to end segregation in Massachusetts public schools. I created the Boston Vigilance Committee to defend fugitive slaves from slave catchers and I was a part of the Underground Railroad, helping to secure clothing, food, money, and transportation for fugitive slaves. As his publisher, I helped Frederick Douglass start his own newspaper, the *North Star*, from 1847 to 1851, and after the Civil War I wrote two of the earliest histories of African Americans, *Services of Colored Americans in the Wars of 1776 and 1812* and *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*.

Harriet Jacobs

From an early age, my life was tough. Born into slavery in North Carolina, my early years were filled with fear and pain, which all enslaved people endure, but enslaved women often bear the additional brutality of sexual assault. In 1835, I escaped and hid in the home of another slave owner, took refuge in a swamp, and then spent seven years in my grandmother's crawl space above her barn. In that tiny space, I could not even sit up straight. Once I finally escaped and made it to the North, I spoke for the antislavery movement, criticizing the Christian Church of the South because of its support of such a horrific institution and its focus on money, as opposed to equality for all people. While working as an abolitionist, I wrote a book with the help of white abolitionist Lydia Maria Child called *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. This book was published in 1852 and became widely known because it was the first account of the particular horrors of the sexual abuse and terror that young enslaved girls go through.

Sarah Parker Redmond

I was born into a family of Black abolitionists. Our home served as a stop on the Underground Railroad for those fleeing slavery. I gave my first abolitionist speech at the age of 16. This was a radical action at the time, not just because I was young and Black, but also because I was a woman; women were expected to stay out of politics and remain in the home. I was a member of the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society in Massachusetts. In addition to advocating against slavery and for women's rights, I also fought racial discrimination in the North. When I was 27 I refused to accept segregated seating at an event at Boston's Howard Athenaeum. I was forcibly removed, and then pushed down a flight of stairs by a police officer. I took the city of Boston to court, and several prominent white feminists, such as Lucy Stone, attended my trial. I was awarded a settlement of \$500, which was a big win and drew national attention. I traveled across the country as an abolitionist lecturer. Eventually, I went to England and stayed in Europe during the Civil War. I gave lectures urging Europeans to pressure their governments to support the North in the war.

Maria Stewart

I was one of the first prominent Black female abolitionists, born free in 1803. I spent my early career working closely with Black abolitionist David Walker and white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison in Boston. My writings were published in his newspaper *The Liberator*, and I regularly gave political lectures in Boston. "Ye daughters of Africa, Awake! Arise!" I told my fellow women. "Distinguish yourself and show the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties." I was the first woman to speak publicly about political issues, and to mixed audiences of men and women, which was considered "promiscuous." Sometimes men harassed me at these speeches, but I refused to be silent just because I was a woman. "What if I am a woman?" I asked my detractors. Women are "martyrs, apostles, warriors, [and] scholars." I received criticism not just for being a woman, but also for being openly critical of men for vices such as drinking and dancing. I believed there was very little time for such things when there was so much work to be done to achieve freedom for Black people, women, and Native Americans. During the Civil War I moved to Washington, D.C., where I worked at the Freedmen's Hospital treating many formerly enslaved people who fled to freedom during the war.

A People's History of the Abolition Movement

BY JAMES BREWER STEWART AND WILLIAM LOREN KATZ

DAVID WALKER WAS A SLIM, 6-foot Black man who made his living running a secondhand clothing store in Boston. His life's goal was to unite African Americans and overthrow slavery. In a few short years he changed the debate over slavery.

In the 1830s, Walker brilliantly and sharply voiced the anguish and aspirations that more than 2 million enslaved people shared with their 320,000 free brothers and sisters. Walker knew from his own family that slave and free were as close as husband and wife. He was born in 1785 in Wilmington, North Carolina, to a free Black woman married to an enslaved man. His father died before David was born. Slaveholder rules assigned the mother's status to the child, so Walker was born free.

In his 20s, Walker said farewell to his mother and began to travel. Soon he left the South: "If I remain in this bloody land, I will not live long," he said. "I cannot remain where I must hear the chains." By the time he arrived in Boston in 1827, he had a purpose: "As true as God reigns, I will be avenged for the sorrows which my people have suffered." In 1829, he published his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*.

Whites enslaved Blacks out of greed, Walker argued, but God had ordained freedom. He condemned the U.S. government, Northern discrimination, and advised his people to prepare "to govern ourselves." Walker's booklet rang with passionate threats and warnings: "I speak Americans for your own good. We must and shall be free . . . in spite of you." To his people he wrote: "The entire emancipation of your enslaved brethren all over the world" depended on unity among African peoples.

He wished to avoid bloodshed, but at times he coldly calculated a path forward: "Never make an

attempt to gain our freedom, or natural right, from under our cruel oppressors and murdered, until you see your way clear — when that hour arrives and you move, be not afraid." "If you commence, make sure work — do not trifle, for they will not trifle with you . . . kill or be killed." He agreed with Jefferson that people had the right of revolution.

Walker's *Appeal* had an electrifying effect in the South, where distribution was probably speeded by sailors Walker had met through his clothing business. In New Orleans, Richmond, and Savannah, African Americans were arrested for owning copies. Legislatures in Georgia, North Carolina, Mississippi, Virginia, and Louisiana imposed a death penalty on anyone circulating materials encouraging slave rebellion. The governor of North Carolina condemned it as "totally subversive . . . an open appeal to natural love of liberty." The Virginia Legislature met in secret session to deal with the *Appeal*. Rewards of \$1,000 or more for Walker's capture or death were offered in Georgia. The mayor of Savannah asked the mayor of Boston to arrest Walker.

On the morning of June 28, 1830, Walker was found dead near his home. His friends believed he had been poisoned. That same year, as if in response to Walker's writings, Southampton County, Virginia, erupted in the largest slave revolt in antebellum [pre-Civil War] America. Nat Turner led an uprising that took the lives of 55 whites. Within days of the rebellion, the government and local militias responded by killing an estimated 200 Blacks, most of whom were not involved in the rebellion.

The white foes of slavery learned from Walker's *Appeal* and Turner's rebellion. William Lloyd

Garrison and other white leaders had previously urged caution and moderation. They believed that emancipation must be slow, owners should be compensated financially for their loss, and those freed shipped to Africa. Many white antislavery activists were members of the American Colonization Society founded in 1816. The Colonization Society encouraged slave owners to voluntarily free their slaves and proposed to resettle U.S. free Blacks in Africa. Most Black leaders rejected colonization as a racist insult.

Abolitionists Get Organized

David Walker's bold language and Nat Turner's bold actions changed the argument. By Jan. 1, 1831, when William Lloyd Garrison began his anti-slavery newspaper *The Liberator*, he had rejected his own earlier, gradual approach and demanded immediate emancipation without any compensation. His words rang with the indignation of a David Walker: "I will not equivocate — I will not excuse — I will not retreat a single inch — AND I WILL BE HEARD."

In December 1833, Garrison helped launch the American Anti-Slavery Society, a national organization devoted to immediate emancipation. Members of the American Anti-Slavery Society pledged to begin organizing antislavery societies in every city, town, and village.

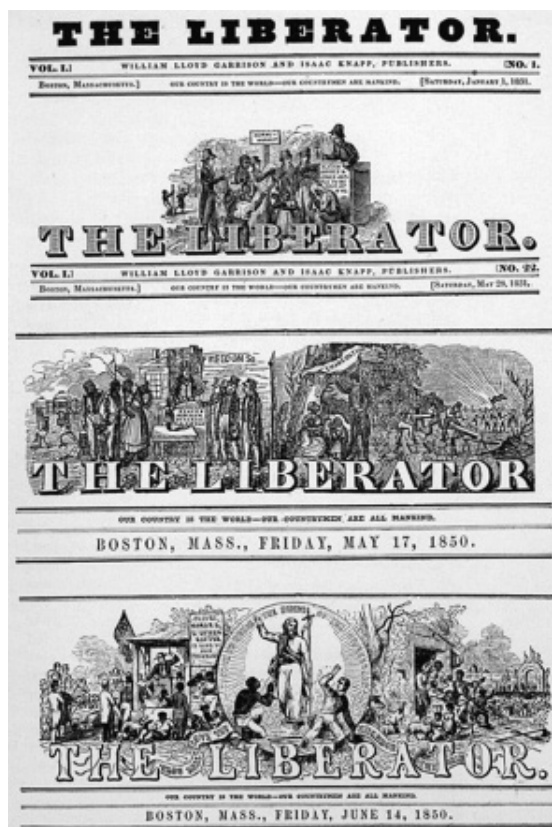
In May 1835, the society began its first major project, the "Great Postal Campaign." Its aim was to flood every town and village, North and South,

with mailings of abolitionist literature. Ministers, elected officials, and newspaper editors in every state were placed on the mailing lists. Organizers assumed that this early campaign would overthrow slavery by building overwhelming moral pressure against the slave owners. One by one, slaveholders would repent, the abolitionists expected, because they would realize that hostile world opinion was "a feeling against which they cannot stand."

The following year, the American Anti-Slavery Society launched the "Great Petition Campaign," sending to the U.S. House of Representatives a tidal wave of citizen requests that Congress pass laws against slavery. Abolitionist women, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, took the lead in circulating petitions, signing them, and sending out the forms. Over half the petitions bore women's signatures. By 1838, the campaigns had mailed more than a million pieces of antislavery literature and forwarded more than 415,000 petitions to Washington. The organization had also grown dramatically. They claimed 1,346 clubs and a quarter of a million members.

These efforts set off a huge reaction of mob activity across the country, brutal repression in the South, and controversy in Congress. In the slave states, mobs urged on by elected officials invaded post offices and burned abolitionist mailings, while state legislatures voted to give

out cash bounties for the capture of leading abolitionists, including Garrison. White Southerners suspected of "abolitionist sympathies" faced harassment and sometimes the whip or the tar bucket.



The Liberator, largely supported by African American subscribers, became the most popular abolitionist newspaper.

The Liberator Files

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., Whigs and Democrats joined in 1836 to pass a “gag rule” that prohibited all discussion of abolitionists’ petitions to the House of Representatives, an unprecedented restriction of citizens’ freedom of political expression. The postmaster general used “states’ rights” to justify Southern postmasters’ refusal to deliver abolitionist mail. In elections across the nation both parties competed for white male votes by stressing anti-abolitionism and white supremacy. Meanwhile, mayhem erupted in cities and towns throughout the free states. Boston; Philadelphia; Pittsburgh; and Utica, Rochester, and Syracuse, New York, witnessed unruly gangs that disrupted abolitionists’ meetings and threatened Black citizens with rocks, garbage, and fists. In New York City and Cincinnati, sheriffs looked unconcerned as buildings in Black neighborhoods and abolitionist offices were burned and looted.

The most frightening scenes were in Alton, a small river town in southern Illinois. In 1836, Elijah P. Lovejoy, a minister and editor of the *Observer*, fled with his family from St. Louis to Alton after a pro-slavery mob destroyed his presses. In St. Louis, Lovejoy had converted to abolitionism through conversations with a local organizer of the American Anti-Slavery Society. He began to use his newspaper to attack slavery as a national sin. After five months in Alton, Lovejoy’s *Observer* was again rolling off the presses. Its circulation jumped from 1,000 to 1,700 copies.

Then, in August 1837, a white mob destroyed Lovejoy’s press, and later, when another press arrived, they returned to throw it in the river. Meetings denounced the minister, but he remained defiant. “I dare not flee away from Alton,” he said; “the contest has commenced here,

and here it must be finished. . . . If I fall, my grave shall be made in Alton.”

In November when another mob assembled, Lovejoy — gun in hand and younger brother Owen at his side — made his stand. The mob set the *Observer*’s building on fire, destroyed the press, and killed Elijah Lovejoy. A grand jury failed to indict any members of the mob.

Lovejoy’s death inspired Wendell Phillips, who would later be named “abolition’s Golden Trumpet” for his incredible speaking ability, to join the movement. Phillips would always remember Lovejoy’s death as the inspiration for his commitment to the cause: “The gun that aimed at the breast of Lovejoy brought me to my feet. I can never forget the agony of that moment.”

By the end of the decade, the abolitionists’ initial campaigns and, ironically, the repressive acts of their opponents had converted many sympathizers into antislavery activists. Every attempt to silence the abolitionists only drew attention to the movement, publicized its principles, and spread concern about civil liberties. Furthermore, riot and repression showed how much power the Southern planter class exercised in the North, deeply disturbing those who already had some reservations about slavery.

A Movement Divided

But the violent reaction of the late 1830s also challenged abolitionists’ early idea that emancipation could be won through moral persuasion. It was now clear that slavery was protected by the federal government, the courts, the two political parties, the bigoted opinions of most white Americans, and even vigilante violence. In the wake of Lovejoy’s murder, Garrison captured perfectly the shocked realization sweeping through the

Every attempt to silence the abolitionists only drew attention to the movement, publicized its principles, and spread concern about civil liberties. Furthermore, riot and repression showed how much power the Southern planter class exercised in the North, deeply disturbing those who already had some reservations about slavery.

movement that abolitionists needed to rethink and revise their fundamental principles:

When we first unfurled the banner of the Liberator . . . we did not anticipate that, in order to protect Southern slavery, the free states would voluntarily trample under foot all order, law, and government, or brand the advocates of universal liberty as incendiaries and outlaws. . . . It did not occur to us that almost every religious sect, and every political party would side with the oppressor.

Garrison concluded that every part of U.S. society was infected by a deep moral disease. He condemned politics as pro-slavery and encouraged abolitionists not to vote. In Garrison's opinion, Northern Whigs and Democrats had reacted much as mobs had, "striving to see who will show the most hatred toward us . . . in order to win Southern votes."

Opponents of Garrison felt strongly that the battle for abolition was being waged within a healthy but seriously flawed society. They pointed to the thousands of ordinary Northerners, who responded to abolitionist attacks on the "slave power" by signing petitions. They insisted that abolitionists had a moral duty to vote for candidates sympathetic to the cause and that abolitionists' main priority should be to win political power. The anti-Garrisonians began to plan a formal political organization, the Liberty Party, to offer abolitionist alternatives in the election of 1840. Over the next two decades, the Liberty Party built coalitions with other new political formations that were not against slavery, but were concerned by the expanding power of the slave states. These coalitions culminated in the formation of the Republican Party in 1854.

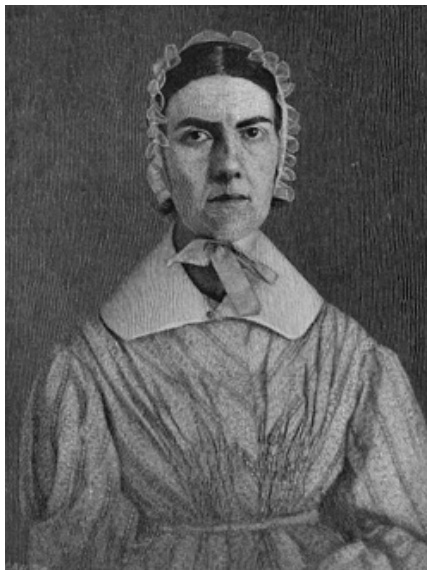
Another split occurred in the abolitionist movement over the role of women and women's

rights. More than anyone else, Angelina Grimké, supported by William Lloyd Garrison, provoked this debate by refusing to remain in her "appointed female sphere." Born to a wealthy slaveholding family in Charleston, South Carolina, Angelina could have led a life of luxury and ease. But witnessing firsthand the abuses slaves endured deeply disturbed her. After unsuccessfully trying to convince her family to abandon their acceptance of slavery, Grimké moved to Philadelphia where her older sister Sarah lived. By 1835, the Grimké sisters had joined Philadelphia's budding abolition-

ist movement and two years later left on their first speaking tour. Sarah became well known as a writer, while Angelina quickly became acknowledged as a powerful and persuasive speaker. The Grimkés confronted the deeply ingrained idea that women should not speak in public and pushed the boundaries even further by speaking before "promiscuous assemblies" — mixed groups of men and women.

When, in 1837, the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts told ministers in the state to refuse to allow female speakers

from their pulpit, it pushed the Grimkés to advocate for women's rights in addition to abolition. Some abolitionists agreed with the ministers and argued that the increasing role women were playing in the movement hurt the campaign to abolish slavery by alienating potential allies. Angelina responded, "We cannot push abolitionism forward with all our might until we take up the stumbling block out of the road. . . . If we surrender the right to speak in public this year, we must surrender the right to petition next year, and the right to write the year after, and so on. What then can woman do for the slave, when she herself is under the feet of man and shamed into silence?"



Angelina Grimké played a key role in pushing for abolitionists to take up the cause of women's rights.

The Liberator Files

Garrison's supporters maintained control over the American Anti-Slavery Society and women's power grew within the organization. As a result, in 1839 opponents of women's rights split to form the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, excluding women from membership. Women also were pushed to the sidelines in the Liberty Party since they could not vote.

African Americans Drive the Antislavery Cause Forward

The impact of these divisions in the abolitionist movement was lessened, however, because a new generation of African American men and women joined the movement. Drawing on lifetimes of discrimination through exclusion from juries, elections, decent schools, and gainful employment, Northern Blacks were painfully aware that complete freedom and formal enslavement represented extremes. For African Americans, far more than for whites, bondage in the South and discrimination in the North were two aspects of the single national problem of white supremacy. Black abolitionists quickly began involving white abolitionists in struggles to resist segregation.

It was Black David Ruggles, for example, who refused in 1841 to sit in the "colored-only" sections of steamboats and railway cars operating in Massachusetts. After being physically ejected, he filed a series of antidiscrimination lawsuits and invited Wendell Phillips and other leading white abolitionists to join him in campaigns of civil disobedience. On a warm August day that same year, Phillips thus found himself on the open air "Negro deck" of a steamer bound to New Bedford, Massachusetts, defying segregation by mingling with 40 Black and white abolitionists, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass among them. Soon thereafter, individual acts of civil disobedience and concerted efforts by integrated groups against segregated transportation systems spread throughout New England and quickly expanded to address the issue of segregation in the public schools.

In the early 1840s Black abolitionists launched successful efforts to boycott segregated schools throughout the Northeast. The most significant struggle took place in Boston led by William Cooper Nell. Nell grew up in Boston and as a high school student experienced discrimination when the mayor refused to invite him — the only Black honors student — to a banquet recognizing outstanding seniors. He went on to study law, but was not admitted to the bar because he would not swear allegiance to the pro-slavery Constitution. While working as the office manager for Garrison's *Liberator*, Nell started a petition campaign to desegregate Boston's schools. When petitions failed, boycotts began, sparked by the fact that one of the white teachers in an all-Black school administered excessive punishments and was regularly absent from class. Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, tried without success to work out a compromise, while school authorities continued to reject the petitions. When Mann tried to ease the situation by appointing a new Black principal in one of the segregated schools, Nell called forth the parents, who surrounded the school and attempted to prevent students from registering. Police drove them away from the schoolyard and the African American principal took office, but the boycott remained strong until April 1855, when the Massachusetts Legislature finally outlawed segregation in public schools across the state.

Escaped slaves who became public speakers made perhaps the most effective contribution to the crusade against slavery. By the 1840s, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and many other people who had escaped slavery had taken to lecturing throughout the North. Their stories of physical abuse and hardship, of separation from loved ones, and of emotional distress forced whites to remember the conditions faced daily by those still enslaved. Slave narratives gave Northern whites a comprehensive picture of life in slavery, countering easy stereotype with brutal reality.

But more than anything else, abolitionist efforts to aid runaway slaves undermined the

political harmony between the North and South. African Americans involved in the Underground Railroad usually relied on one another and distrusted whites' involvement. They set up "vigilance groups," like one led by David Ruggles in New York, to prevent slave catchers from capturing fugitives. Starting in the 1840s, more and more white abolitionists joined with Black abolitionists to not just persuade Northerners through anti-slavery speeches, but also to take direct action by encouraging enslaved Blacks to escape and protecting them once in the North. Most famously, Harriet Tubman, herself a fugitive who operated from Canada, made more than 19 trips into the South and brought back more than 300 people.

"It Outlaws Me and I Outlaw It!": Abolitionists Fight New Laws

Worried Southern planters began to demand new federal legislation to prevent "slave-stealing." Pro-slavery politicians obtained what they wanted in the Compromise of 1850, which included a harsh new Fugitive Slave Law. It imposed severe penalties for aiding runaways, denied the accused the right to testify, and required citizens to help catch runaways. Free Blacks found themselves in jeopardy of being claimed as escapees, seized, and shipped South without so much as a hearing. Whites who had believed that slavery would not touch them now faced jail and fines if they refused to follow the commands of slave hunters. As slavery's violence spilled into Northern streets, many abolitionists abandoned their commitments to nonviolence.

Black communities prepared for battle. Jermain Wesley Loguen, who once had been enslaved, announced: "I don't respect this law — I don't fear it — I won't obey it! It outlaws me and I outlaw it!" Fugitive Lewis Hayden, who hid runaways in his Boston home, announced he had placed two kegs

of explosives in his basement and would blow up the house rather than surrender to anyone.

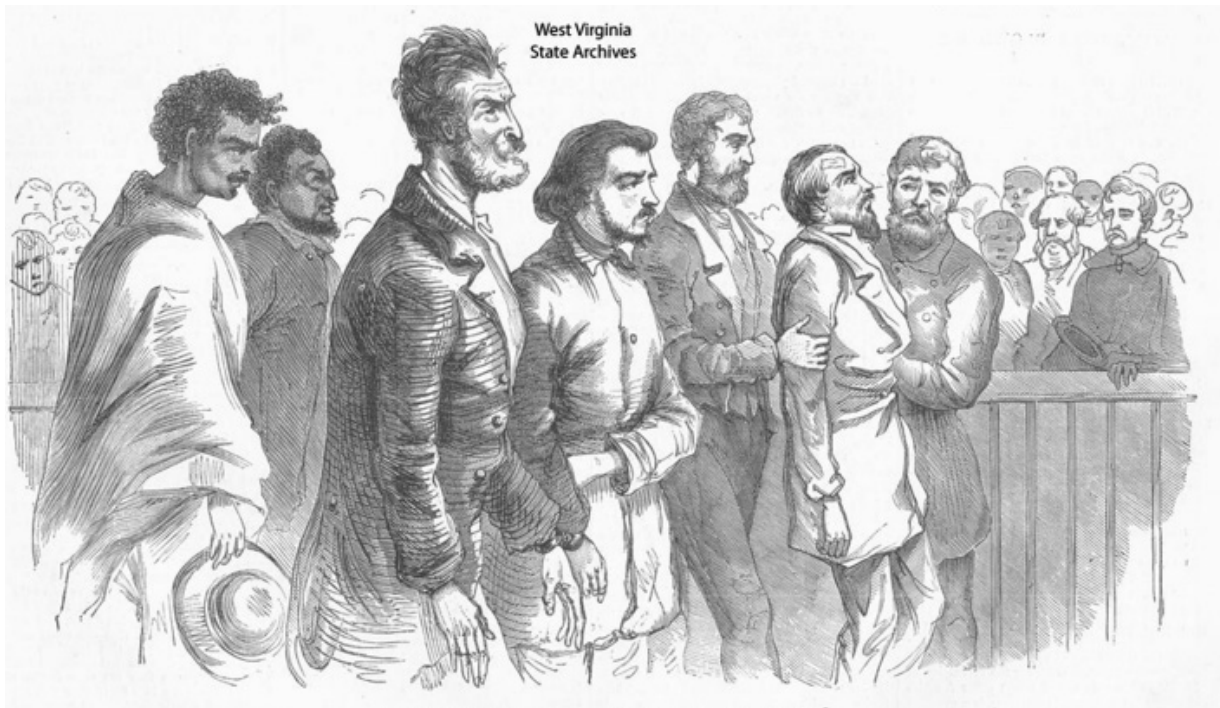
Abolitionists of both races throughout the North announced that they would militantly oppose the new Fugitive Slave Law. "The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter," Frederick Douglass vowed, "is to make half a dozen dead kidnappers." Douglass' words reflected the growing support for direct action. On several occasions well-organized groups of abolitionists overwhelmed federal marshals and helped fugitives to safety. As Blacks and whites united in defying the Fugitive Slave Law, resistance sometimes turned violent, as in Christiana, Pennsylvania, where in 1851 an abolitionist shot a slaveholder, or in Boston in 1854, when an attempt to free a fugitive by storming the courthouse and overpowering guards led to a fatality. And even when physical violence did not occur, speakers such as Wendell Phillips increasingly urged their audiences to physically obstruct federal slave catchers if more peaceable

means failed. Most agreed with Phillips when he declared that any Black American "should feel justified in using the law of God and man in shooting [any] officer" attempting to enforce the law.

The Fugitive Slave Law set North against South. It made some Northern whites wonder if owners of slaves might be trying to control all of the United States. By sending Southern posses racing through the streets of Northern cities and towns, slaveholders triggered anger from those who

thought they were untouched by slavery. Of course in reality, the Northern economy was always tied to slave labor, but the increased presence of slave catchers made this harder to ignore. As the decade progressed, two more decisions in Washington — the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the *Dred Scott* decision — reinforced the growing divisions between the North and the South and fueled abolitionists' growing militancy.

Black communities prepared for battle. Jermain Loguen, who once had been enslaved, announced, "I don't respect this law — I don't fear it — I won't obey it! It outlaws me and I outlaw it!"



Porte Crayon, *Harper's Weekly*, Boyd B. Stutler Collection, West Virginia State Archives

John Brown and his multiracial group of fighters proved that white and Black abolitionists were willing to die to end slavery.

In 1854, Congress passed a bill that allowed the voters in the Kansas and Nebraska territories to decide whether slavery would be legal, opening territories previously declared free to slavery. Once passed, the Kansas-Nebraska Act provoked a race to the territories as free-staters and pro-slavery supporters sought to control the elections. In Kansas, the political struggle soon turned into guerilla warfare. Among the abolitionists who went to Kansas to fight against slavery's expansion was John Brown. Before leaving for Kansas, Brown campaigned in the abolitionist strongholds of the North for financial and moral support. With few exceptions, like William Lloyd Garrison who clung to nonviolence, abolitionists supported John Brown's crusade.

Then in 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court declared in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that slavery would be fully protected by the federal government throughout the United States. Scott, who was enslaved, had been taken by his "owner" into territory declared free and sued for his freedom. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney not only denied Scott's suit, but in a set of sweeping

pronouncements also gave legal justification to the institution of slavery. Taney declared that the Constitution did not give Congress the power to legislate the limits of slavery's expansion. He added that according to the Founding Fathers, Blacks possessed no rights before the law that whites were "bound to respect." Slavery, in short, was a national institution and white supremacy was the law of the land.

Determined to end the system despite the political gains of the slaveholders, abolitionists became increasingly revolutionary. By the 1850s, thousands of its Black and white men and women members were helping runaways escape, challenging federal efforts to return fugitives, and discussing slavery's violent overthrow in the South.

"The Lesson of the Hour Is Insurrection": John Brown's Daring Raid

On abolition's cutting edge was John Brown. In 1858, Brown led a group of 18 armed men into Missouri, liberating five slaves and escorting them to freedom in Canada. While slave catchers were

legally capturing Blacks in the North and selling them into slavery, Brown *illegally* invaded a slave state and directly freed slaves. In October 1859, John Brown and a multiracial group of devoted fighters were captured while raiding Harpers Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to provoke rebellion among the slaves. Some of abolitionism's most militant figures such as Frederick Douglass had helped finance Brown's attack. Others had known what Brown was planning. Some activists like Harriet Tubman had even helped Brown recruit supporters for the raid. John Brown's raid was the dramatic example of direct action many abolitionists were hoping for. After weeks of preparation, Brown and his multiracial band of 22 descended on Harpers Ferry, seized the federal arsenal, and took several hostages, hoping to incite insurrection among the enslaved and free Blacks. But enslaved African Americans, who were startled by John Brown's raid, did not join Brown's army of liberation and he and his men were captured by troops commanded by Colonel Robert E. Lee.

Most abolitionists supported Brown's insurrectionary deeds. Brown was jailed, given a quick trial, then sentenced and hanged by Virginia authorities in December of 1859. In Brooklyn, Wendell Phillips electrified an immense audience with his pronouncement that "the lesson of the hour is insurrection." Brown, Phillips declared, "has twice as much right to hang Governor Wise [of Virginia] as Governor Wise has to hang him." For most Blacks, Brown was a hero. His assault proved that some whites were willing to die fighting slavery.

Some abolitionists, Garrison included, clung to nonviolence and hurried to separate their belief in

the slaves' inherent right to rebel from what they saw as Brown's terrorism. Yet the whites most anxious to disassociate themselves from Brown were the leaders of the new Republican Party, including Abraham Lincoln. Hoping to distance themselves from "Black abolitionism," Republicans organized anti-Brown protest meetings in major cities. Lincoln explained Brown to slaveholders as the lone, mad assassin who appeared from time to time in world history.

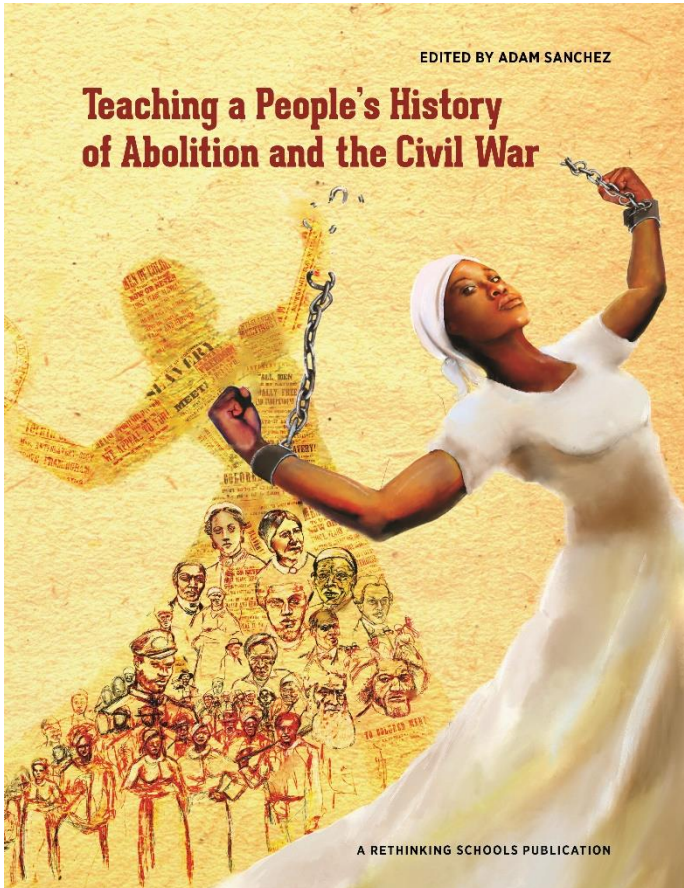
Yet Lincoln's reassurances to the slaveholders did not convince them. The slaveholding South saw the increasing radicalism of the abolitionists as representing the North's true intentions. Nevertheless, the quiet courage and thoughtful words of Brown during the 40 days before his execution stirred the world and placed emancipation on the national agenda. In his final note, handed to a guard just before his execution, Brown predicted the coming Civil War. He declared "that the crimes of this guilty land can never be purged away, but with blood."

Adapted from James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996) and William Loren Katz, *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1990).

James Brewer Stewart is the James Wallace Professor Emeritus at Macalester College, founder of *Historians Against Slavery*, and author of a dozen books on the history of the abolition movement in the United States.

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