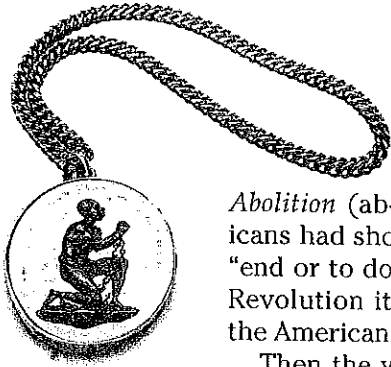


31 Abolitionists Want to End Slavery



The famous plea on this abolitionist pottery medallion cries: "Am I not a man and a brother?"

Abolition (ab-uh-LISH-un)! Back in 1765 Americans had shouted the word. To *abolish* means to "end or to do away with something." Before the Revolution it was the hated British stamp tax the American colonists wanted to abolish.

Then the word began to be used with a new meaning. It was the slave trade some wanted to abolish, and then slavery itself. In 1773, Ben Franklin wrote in a letter that "a disposition to abolish slavery prevails in North America." That—in plain English—means people in North America want to find a way to end slavery. Two years later Franklin helped found the American Abolition Society.

The official African slave trade did end—when the Constitution said it would—in 1808. But slavery continued. And an illegal slave trade began.

The problem was one of finding workers for jobs nobody wanted. No one had anything good to say about slavery—at least not in George Washington's day. But then, slowly, some people's ideas changed.

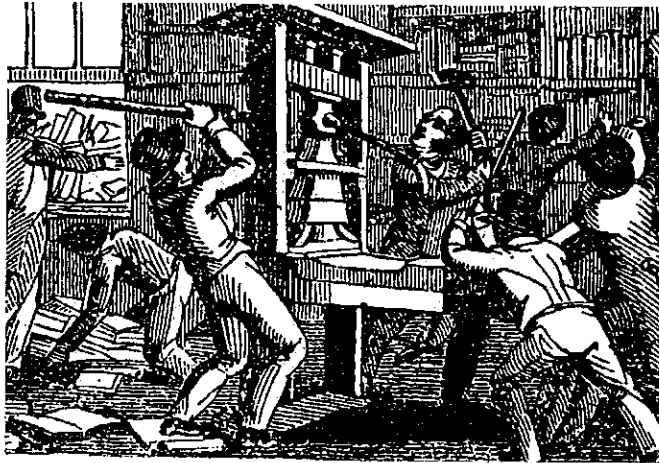
Partly it was because, during the 1820s and 1830s, some slaves rebelled and killed white people. After that, white Southerners started to be afraid of the slaves. Slavery became even more cruel. New laws were passed that gave slaves almost no rights at all. Some Southerners began finding excuses for slavery. Others began to say it was a fine way of life—for slave and master.

If you read the diaries and letters of white Southerners you will see there were many who knew better. Robert E. Lee, who was to become the South's most famous general in the Civil War, wrote in a letter, "Slavery is a moral evil in any society...more so to the

Fear was always a part of slavery. When you abuse people you are likely to be afraid of their anger. Thomas Jefferson called slavery a "wolf." He wrote, "We have the wolf by the ears, and we can neither hold him nor safely let him go." What did he mean by that?

Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and Gabriel Prosser were slaves who led freedom rebellions. None was successful.

America in the first half of the 19th century was like two separate nations. The North was becoming a modern, industrial, urban nation, with railroads, canals, steamboats, and factories—as well as farms. Many of the workers in the new factories and mills were immigrants. The South remained an agricultural region. Mostly, immigrants stayed away from the South.



Moral has to do with understanding the difference between good and evil. A person who is moral acts with goodness in mind. A person who is **immoral** doesn't care about the difference between right and wrong. What did Robert E. Lee mean? Why was slavery more of a moral evil for whites than for blacks?

Willing Sacrifice

From the beginnings of slavery, blacks had fought enslavement. Some had run away to freedom. Some had joined Indian tribes. In 1804, a slave who took part in a rebellion was brought to trial. This is what he told the court: *I have nothing more to offer than what George Washington would have had to offer had he been taken by the British and put to trial by them. I have adventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice to their cause.*

Elijah Lovejoy was an Illinois printer who kept publishing about the wrongs of slavery even when his printing press was destroyed and his warehouse burned. Then he was murdered. But his brother Owen carried on his fight.

white than to the black." But some people didn't care about morality. The South was having economic problems—and some Southern political leaders began blaming the North for those problems.

Virginia and South Carolina had once been very rich colonies. They had been the envy of all the Americas. Now the "Old South" was in decline. The tobacco

land was worn out. Economic power—money—had moved to the new cotton states and to the new industries in the North.

The Southern leaders didn't seem to understand what was happening. Immigrants and ideas and inventions were changing the North. The South was left out of that excitement. Newcomers didn't want to move south. They knew that as workers they couldn't compete with slaves for jobs. The South became isolated; it didn't grow with the 19th century.

Southerners began to live in a world of olden times. They read stories of the old days and believed those days were better. They wouldn't admit they were trapped in an evil system that got worse and worse each year.

Religious groups got involved. In the North, the Quakers were at the center of the abolitionist movement. But the leaders of some other religions—North and South—defended slavery.

The South became very jealous of political power. So did the North. Each wanted to dominate the nation. Each was afraid of the other. Tempers flared. It got more intense than that old conflict between Federalists and Republicans. But, as long as Congress was divided evenly between slave states and free states, there was some stability.

Then, in 1820, Missouri asked to enter the Union as a slave state. Northerners were alarmed. If Missouri became a state, the North would be outvoted in Congress. Northern congressmen were afraid of what might happen next. Suppose Congress voted to allow slavery in all the states! The situation was tense. Finally, a solution was found. Here it is: Maine was carved from Massachusetts and made into a state, a free state. That kept the balance of free and slave states. That action was called the Missouri Compromise. The

Missouri Compromise also said that the rest of the Louisiana Purchase territory that was north of Missouri's southern border was to remain free. (Look at the map on page 161. This is complicated but important.) The Missouri Compromise kept some of the anger between North and South under control...for a while.

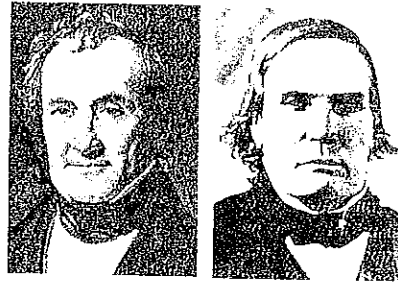
Meanwhile, in the first years of the 19th century, most European countries abolished—ended—slavery. Those countries began to criticize the United States for allowing it. Some people in the North—who for a long time hadn't seemed to care about it—started speaking out against slavery. By 1840 there were said to be about 2,000 abolitionist societies in the North. While some Northerners and Southerners talked of gradually freeing the slaves and even paying the slave owners, the abolitionists wanted to do away with slavery at once. They didn't think anyone should be paid for owning someone else. (As it turned out, it would have been much cheaper to pay the slave owners than to go to war.)

When the abolitionists published newspapers and books that attacked slavery, Southern postmasters wouldn't let them be delivered. (Southern whites were losing their liberty. They couldn't read what they wanted.)

Don't think this was a case of good Northerners and bad Southerners. Many white Southerners hated slavery and treated blacks decently. And many white Northerners didn't seem to know about the Golden Rule ("Do unto others..."). Northern blacks were rarely given the rights of citizens: in most places they weren't allowed to vote or serve on juries. In the North, blacks often held the worst jobs, and black children were usually not allowed in white schools.

Many white Northerners hated the abolitionists. Some Northern industries depended on Southern business. Because of that, some Northerners didn't want to upset the South. Other Northerners were just afraid of change. (And what the abolitionists were demanding was a major change in the United States.) Unfortunately, there are always people who fear new ideas. In the North, abolitionist presses were burned and destroyed and one abolitionist was actually murdered.

In the South, the abolitionists were really hated. When Northerners talked about abolishing slavery it made white Southerners furious. They were the ones whose lives would be changed. They didn't think it was the Yankees' business, and they said so. They didn't want to hear criticism of their beloved South. They didn't want to be told they were doing something immoral. Many white Southerners believed their liberty and property were being threatened



When Missouri wanted to become a state, James Tallmadge (*left*), a New York congressman, proposed a constitutional amendment to ban slavery there. The Southern states wouldn't agree to that, so Senator Jesse Thomas of Illinois (*right*) introduced an amendment to forbid slavery north of 36°30'—except in Missouri. Then Maine was made a nonslave state. That was the Missouri Compromise.

These were the 12 free states in 1820 at the time of the Missouri Compromise: Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. And these were the 12 slave states: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. According to the 1820 census, 5.1 million Americans lived in the free states and territories; 4.4 million lived in the Southern slave states.

Would secession by New England have helped the slaves? Would it have prevented war?

You can see this was an argument that was heating up. The abolitionists wrote and printed newspapers and books. Former slaves began to speak out and tell their stories. The abolitionists got angrier and angrier. Some abolitionists were so outraged by slavery they suggested that New England secede from the Union. That means they wanted to separate themselves from the other states. They wanted to form their own country. Some people in the South began saying the same thing. They wanted to secede and form their own country. These people were serious. No good would come of this.

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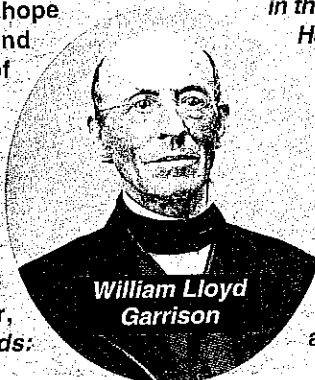


THE UNITED STATES
DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

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 PRAYING THE
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 Christian men
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 —William Lloyd

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...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.

I am extremely happy to hear that you are establishing a Paper in Boston. I hope your efforts may not be in vain; and that the "Liberator" be the means of exposing more and more the odious system of Slavery....Whilst...the spirit of Freedom is marching with rapid strides and causing tyrants to tremble, may America awake from the apathy in which she has long slumbered.



It became my meat and drink. My soul was set on fire. Its sympathy for my brethren in bonds—its scathing denunciations of slaveholders—its faithful exposures of slavery—its powerful attacks upon the upholders of the institution—sent a thrill of joy through my soul, such as I had never felt before!