

SECTION 2

The Abolitionists

Guide to Reading

Main Idea

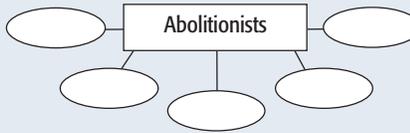
Many reformers turned their attention to eliminating slavery.

Key Terms

abolitionist, Underground Railroad

Reading Strategy

Organizing Information As you read Section 2, identify five abolitionists. Below each name, write a sentence describing his or her role in the movement.



Read to Learn

- how some Americans worked to eliminate slavery.
- why many Americans feared the end of slavery.

Section Theme

Individual Action Leaders such as Harriet Tubman and William Lloyd Garrison strengthened the abolitionist movement.

Preview of Events



William Lloyd Garrison

AN American Story

William Lloyd Garrison, a dramatic and spirited man, fought strongly for the right of African Americans to be free. On one occasion Garrison was present when Frederick Douglass, an African American who had escaped from slavery, spoke to a white audience about life as a slave. Douglass electrified his listeners with a powerful speech. Suddenly Garrison leaped to his feet. "Is this a man," he demanded of the audience, "or a thing?" Garrison shared Douglass's outrage at the notion that people could be bought and sold like objects.

Early Efforts to End Slavery

The spirit of reform that swept the United States in the early 1800s was not limited to improving education and expanding the arts. It also included the efforts of **abolitionists** like Garrison and Douglass—members of the growing band of reformers who worked to abolish, or end, slavery.

Even before the American Revolution, some Americans had tried to limit or end slavery. At the Constitutional Convention in 1787, the delegates had reached a compromise on the difficult issue, agreeing to let each state decide whether to allow slavery. By the early 1800s, Northern states had ended slavery, but it continued in the South.



The religious revival and the reform movement of the early and mid-1800s gave new life to the antislavery movement. Many Americans came to believe that slavery was wrong. Yet not all Northerners shared this view. The conflict over slavery continued to build.

Many of the men and women who led the antislavery movement came from the Quaker faith. One Quaker, Benjamin Lundy, wrote:

“I heard the wail of the captive. I felt his pang of distress, and the iron entered my soul.”

Lundy founded a newspaper in 1821 to spread the abolitionist message.

American Colonization Society

The first large-scale antislavery effort was not aimed at abolishing slavery but at resettling African Americans in Africa or the Caribbean. The **American Colonization Society**, formed in 1816 by a group of white Virginians, worked to free enslaved workers gradually by buying them from slaveholders and sending them abroad to start new lives.

The society raised enough money from private donors, Congress, and a few state legislatures to send several groups of African Americans out of the country. Some went to the west coast of Africa, where the society had acquired land for a colony. In 1822 the first African American settlers arrived in this colony, called **Liberia**, Latin for “place of freedom.”

In 1847 Liberia became an independent country. American emigration to Liberia continued until the Civil War. Some 12,000 to 20,000 African Americans settled in the new country between 1822 and 1865.

The American Colonization Society did not halt the growth of slavery. The number of enslaved people continued to increase at a steady pace, and the society could only resettle a small number of African Americans. Furthermore, most African Americans did not want to go to Africa. Many were from families that had

lived in America for several generations. They simply wanted to be free in American society. African Americans feared that the society aimed to strengthen slavery.

Reading Check Explaining How did the American Colonization Society fight slavery?

The Movement Changes

Reformers realized that the gradual approach to ending slavery had failed. Moreover, the numbers of enslaved persons had sharply increased because the cotton boom in the Deep South made planters increasingly dependent on slave labor. Beginning in about 1830, the American antislavery movement took on new life. Soon it became the most pressing social issue for reformers.

William Lloyd Garrison

Abolitionist **William Lloyd Garrison** stimulated the growth of the antislavery movement. In 1829 Garrison left Massachusetts to work for the country’s leading antislavery newspaper in Baltimore. Impatient with the paper’s moderate position, Garrison returned to Boston in 1831 to found his own newspaper, *The Liberator*.



“I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person now that I was free . . . I felt like I was in heaven.”

—Harriet Tubman,
on her escape from
slavery, 1849

TWO VIEWPOINTS

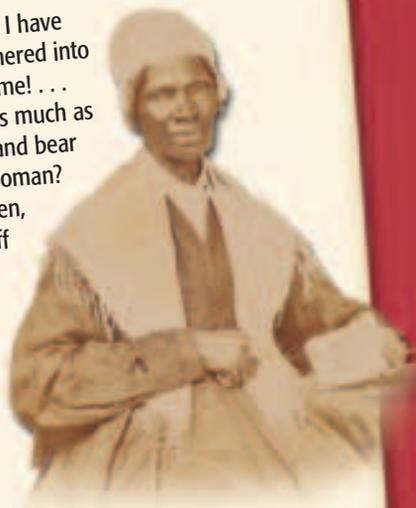
Is American Slavery Compassionate or Cruel?

More than any other factor, slavery isolated the South from the rest of the United States. While abolitionists cried out to bring the cruel practice to an end, Southern slaveholders defended the only way of life they knew.

Sojourner Truth, former slave, 1851

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! . . . I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?

I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?



Sojourner Truth

Jeremiah Jeter, Southern slaveholder, c. 1820

I could not free them, for the laws of the State forbade it. Yet even if they had not forbidden it, the slaves in my possession were in no condition to support themselves. It was simple cruelty to free a mother with dependent children. Observation, too, had satisfied me that the free negroes were, in general, in a worse condition than the slaves. The manumission [setting free] of my slaves to remain in the State was not to be thought of. Should I send them to Liberia? Some of them were in a condition to go, but none of them desired to. If sent, they [would] be forced to leave wives and children belonging to other masters [on nearby plantations], to dwell in a strange land.

Learning From History

1. Why do you think Sojourner Truth was an effective speaker?
2. Why didn't Jeremiah Jeter just free his slaves?
3. Do the two excerpts contradict each other? In what way?

Garrison was one of the first white abolitionists to call for the “immediate and complete emancipation [freeing]” of enslaved people. Promising to be “as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice,” he denounced the slow, gradual approach of other reformers. In the first issue of his paper he wrote: “I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.”

Garrison *was* heard. He attracted enough followers to start the New England Antislavery Society in 1832 and the American Antislavery Society the next year. The **abolitionist movement** grew rapidly. By 1838 the antislavery societies Garrison started had more than 1,000 chapters, or local branches.

The Grimké Sisters

Among the first women who spoke out publicly against slavery were **Sarah** and **Angelina Grimké**. Born in South Carolina to a wealthy slaveholding family, the sisters moved to Philadelphia in 1832.

In the North the Grimké sisters lectured and wrote against slavery. At one antislavery meeting, Angelina Grimké exclaimed,

“As a Southerner, I feel that it is my duty to stand up . . . against slavery. I have seen it! I have seen it!”

The Grimkés persuaded their mother to give them their share of the family inheritance. Instead of money or land, the sisters asked for several of the enslaved workers, whom they immediately freed.

Angelina Grimké and her husband, abolitionist Theodore Weld, wrote *American Slavery As It Is* in 1839. This collection of firsthand accounts of life under slavery was one of the most influential abolitionist publications of its time.

African American Abolitionists

Although white abolitionists drew public attention to the cause, African Americans themselves played a major role in the abolitionist movement from the start. The abolition of slavery was an especially important goal to the free African Americans of the North.

Most African Americans in the North lived in poverty in cities. Although they were excluded from most jobs and were often attacked by white mobs, a great many of these African Americans were intensely proud of their freedom and wanted to help those who were still enslaved.

African Americans took an active part in organizing and directing the American Antislavery Society, and they subscribed in large numbers to William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*. In 1827 Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm started the country's first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*. Most of the other newspapers that African Americans founded before the Civil War also promoted abolition.

Born a free man in North Carolina, writer **David Walker** of Boston published an impassioned argument against slavery, challenging African Americans to rebel and overthrow slavery by force. "America is more our country than it is the whites'—we have enriched it with our blood and tears," he wrote.

In 1830 free African American leaders held their first convention in Philadelphia. Delegates met "to devise ways and means for the bettering of our condition." They discussed starting an African American college and encouraging free African Americans to emigrate to Canada.

Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass, the most widely known African American abolitionist, was born enslaved in Maryland. After teaching himself to read and write, he escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1838 and settled first in Massachusetts and then in New York.

As a runaway, Douglass could have been captured and returned to slavery. Still, he joined the Massachusetts Antislavery Society and traveled widely to address abolitionist meetings. A powerful speaker, Douglass often moved listeners to

tears with his message. At an Independence Day gathering he told the audience:

“What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July?”

I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham . . . your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless . . . your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery.”

For 16 years, Douglass edited an antislavery newspaper called the *North Star*. Douglass won admiration as a powerful and influential speaker and writer. He traveled abroad, speaking to huge antislavery audiences in London and the West Indies.

Douglass returned to the United States because he believed abolitionists must fight slavery at its source. He insisted that African Americans receive not just their freedom but full equality with whites as well. In 1847 friends helped Douglass purchase his freedom from the slaveholder from whom he had fled in Maryland.

Sojourner Truth

"I was born a slave in Ulster County, New York," Isabella Baumfree began when she told her story to audiences. Called "Belle," she lived in the cellar of a slaveholder's house. She escaped in 1826 and gained official freedom in 1827 when New York banned slavery. She eventually settled in New York City.

In 1843 Belle chose a new name. "**Sojourner Truth** is my name," she said, "because from this day I will walk in the light of [God's] truth." She began to work in the movements for abolitionism and for women's rights.

 **Reading Check** **Explaining** Why did Frederick Douglass return to the United States?



Student Web Activity
Visit tarvol1.glencoe.com
and click on **Chapter 14—**
Student Web Activities
for an activity on the abolitionist movement.

MORE ABOUT...

The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was neither “underground” nor a “railroad.” It was a secret organization to help African Americans escape from slavery. The escape of Henry Brown is one of the most remarkable stories in the history of the Underground Railroad.

Henry Brown Henry “Box” Brown escaped slavery by having himself sealed into a small box and shipped from Richmond to Philadelphia. Although “this side up” was marked on the crate, he spent a good part of the trip upside down. When news of his escape spread, he wrote an autobiography and spoke to many anti-slavery groups.

After his wife and children were sold to a slaveholder in another state, Brown was determined to escape.

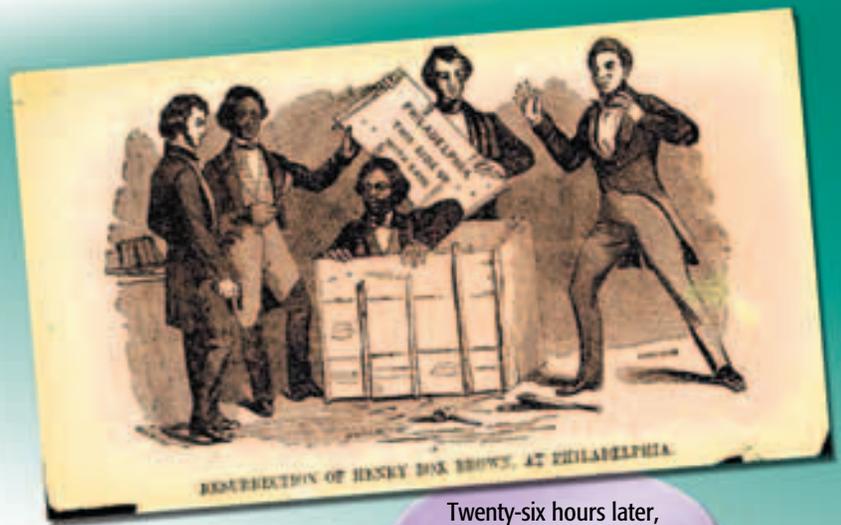
“It all seemed a comparatively light price to pay for liberty.”

—Henry “Box” Brown

Another man transported the crate, with Brown in it, to a shipping company in Richmond, Virginia.

From there, the crate was sent to the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Office.

Twenty-six hours later, the top of the crate was pried off and Brown emerged, a free man.



The Underground Railroad

Some abolitionists risked prison—even death—by secretly helping African Americans escape from slavery. The network of escape routes from the South to the North came to be called the **Underground Railroad**.

The Underground Railroad had no trains or tracks. Instead, passengers on this “railroad” traveled through the night, often on foot, and went north—guided by the North Star. The runaway slaves followed rivers and mountain chains, or felt for moss growing on the north side of trees.

Songs such as “Follow the Drinkin’ Gourd” encouraged runaways on their way to freedom. A hollowed-out gourd was used to dip water for drinking. Its shape resembled the Big Dipper, which pointed to the North Star.

“When the river ends in between two hills,
Follow the drinkin’ gourd,
For the Ole Man’s waitin’ for to carry you
to freedom.
Follow the drinkin’ gourd.”

During the day passengers rested at “stations”—barns, attics, church basements, or other places where fugitives could rest, eat, and hide until the next night’s journey. The railroad’s “conductors” were whites and African Americans who helped guide the escaping slaves to freedom in the North.

In the early days, many people made the journey north on foot. Later they traveled in wagons, sometimes equipped with secret compartments. African Americans on the Underground Railroad hoped to settle in a free state in the North

or to move on to Canada. Once in the North, however, fugitives still feared capture. Henry Bibb, a runaway who reached Ohio, arrived at “the place where I was directed to call on an Abolitionist, but I made no stop: so great were my fears of being pursued.”

After her escape from slavery, Harriet Tubman became the most famous conductor on the Underground Railroad. Slaveholders offered a large reward for Tubman’s capture or death.

The Underground Railroad helped only a tiny fraction of the enslaved population. Most who used it as a route to freedom came from the states located between the northern states

and the Deep South. Still, the Underground Railroad gave hope to those who suffered in slavery. It also provided abolitionists with a way to help some enslaved people to freedom.

Clashes Over Abolitionism

The antislavery movement led to an intense reaction against abolitionism. Southern slaveholders—and many Southerners who did not have slaves—opposed abolitionism because they believed it threatened the South’s way of life, which depended on enslaved labor. Many people in the North also opposed the abolitionist movement.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC
The Underground Railroad
In Motion

Geography Skills

Many enslaved African Americans escaped to freedom with the help of the Underground Railroad.

- 1. Movement** Which river did enslaved persons cross before reaching Indiana and Ohio?
- 2. Analyzing Information** About how many miles did an enslaved person travel from Montgomery, Alabama, to Windsor, Canada?

“I sometimes dream that I am pursued, and when I wake, I am scared almost to death.”

—Nancy Howard, 1855

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Opposition in the North

Even in the North, abolitionists never numbered more than a small fraction of the population. Many Northerners saw the antislavery movement as a threat to the nation's social order. They feared the abolitionists could bring on a destructive war between the North and the South. They also claimed that, if the enslaved African Americans were freed, they could never blend into American society.

Economic fears further fed the backlash against abolitionism. Northern workers worried that freed slaves would flood the North and take jobs away from whites by agreeing to work for lower pay.

Opposition to abolitionism sometimes erupted into violence against the abolitionists themselves. In the 1830s a Philadelphia mob burned the city's antislavery headquarters to the ground and set off a bloody race riot. In Boston a mob attacked abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and threatened to hang him. Authorities saved his life by locking him in jail.

Elijah Lovejoy was not so lucky. Lovejoy edited an abolitionist newspaper in Illinois. Three times angry whites invaded his offices and wrecked his presses. Each time Lovejoy installed new presses and resumed publication. The fourth time the mob set fire to the building. When Lovejoy came out of the blazing building, he was shot and killed.

The South Reacts

Southerners fought abolitionism by mounting arguments in defense of slavery. They claimed that slavery was essential to the South. Slave labor, they said, had allowed Southern whites to reach a high level of culture.

Southerners also argued that they treated enslaved people well. Some Southerners argued that Northern workers were worse off than slaves. The industrial economy of the North employed factory workers for long hours at low wages. These jobs were repetitious and often dangerous, and Northern workers had to pay for their goods from their small earnings. Unlike the "wage slavery" of the North, Southerners said that the system of slavery provided food, clothing, and medical care to the workers.

Other defenses of slavery were based on racism. Many whites believed that African Americans were better off under white care than on their own. "Providence has placed [the slave] in our hands for his own good," declared one Southern governor.

The conflict between proslavery and antislavery groups continued to mount. At the same time, a new women's rights movement was growing, and many leading abolitionists were involved in that movement as well.

Reading Check Explaining Why did many Northerners oppose the abolition of slavery?

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

Checking for Understanding

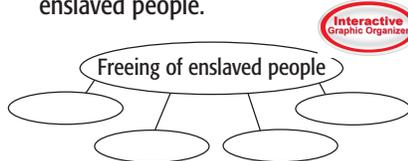
- Key Terms** Write a short paragraph in which you use these key terms: **abolitionist**, **Underground Railroad**.
- Reviewing Facts** Describe the American Colonization Society's solution to slavery.

Reviewing Themes

- Individual Action** What role did Harriet Tubman play in the antislavery movement?

Critical Thinking

- Comparing** Compare the arguments of Northerners with Southerners who opposed abolitionism.
- Organizing Information** Use a diagram like the one below to identify actions that abolitionists took to free enslaved people.



Analyzing Visuals

- Geography Skills** Study the map of the Underground Railroad on page 423. Why do you think more enslaved people escaped from the border states than from the Deep South?

Interdisciplinary Activity

Informative Writing Research the life of an abolitionist. Write a one-page biography that describes important events in his or her life.