

The Abolition Movement

Frederick Douglass had been raised as a slave in Maryland. He had both kind and cruel masters, had been taught to read and write, and had worked as a field hand, a house servant, and a caulker in a Baltimore shipyard. In 1838, he escaped to New York City, then to New Bedford, Connecticut. There he began reading William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*. Douglass had heard of "abolitionists" when he was a slave but had never met one until now. In 1841, he went to the meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society at Nantucket, and he was asked to speak. Despite his nervousness, he spoke, and a crowd of white people listened. He had found new friends, and he went on to become a leader in the movement.



Frederick Douglass

Anti-slavery people had been around for years, and their supporters included many southerners. For people like Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson, slavery was like a knot that could not be untied. Abolitionists would not bother to untie it; they would take an ax to it. Different names have been suggested as the founders of the movement. Some argue it began with the African-Americans protesting colonization. Others believe it began with David Walker, who published *Walker's Appeal* in 1829, urging a violent end to slavery. Still others say it began when Charles Grandison Finney brought his western revival to New York in 1830. His attacks on slavery brought Arthur and Lewis Tappan, wealthy merchants, to the anti-slavery cause.

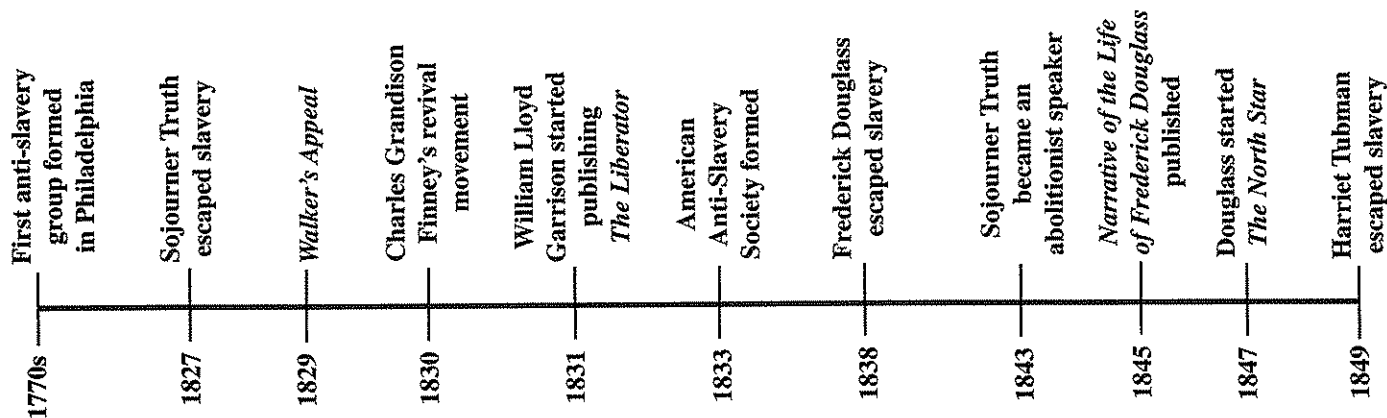
Whoever began it, William Lloyd Garrison became its lightning rod. He was a strange man in many ways, but he was fearless in the abolition cause. The first edition of *The Liberator* came out in 1831, and it continued until slavery ended in 1865. Garrison helped Douglass get started as a speaker and writer. Douglass soon became so effective that he went out on his own, and he published his autobiography and edited his own newspaper, *The North Star*. For many years, he was the spokesman for African-Americans.

William Wells Brown, son of a slave woman, worked for the abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy. Brown went on to become an able speaker for the American Anti-Slavery Society, as well as a journalist and historian.

Women also joined the abolition cause. Two white sisters, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, were daughters of a South Carolina slaveowner, and they discovered that they had an African-American brother. They moved to the North and became outspoken critics of slavery. Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, both of whom were former slaves, were also very active abolitionists.

Politically, the movement did not have much influence in Congress until it found two able spokesmen: Joshua Giddings and John Q. Adams. The former president had so much prestige that he was known as "Old Man Eloquent." When he spoke against slavery, others listened.

RESULTS: Abolitionists had many enemies in both the North and South. These enemies often considered them cranks trying to stir up trouble, and they were right! Like many reformers, they would not be silenced until victory was theirs.



Abolitionists Act, Congress Reacts



William Lloyd Garrison

One feature of the American character is the desire to reform everyone else. It is also American for those criticized to complain that the reformers have no proof for the charges, and they are troublemakers trying to disrupt the life of the individual or even the nation.

Many reformers were part of pre-Civil War America. Horace Mann pushed for tax-supported public education; critics said it was too expensive. He won, and by 1860, all northern states had public school. Some women and a few men favored giving women the vote; they did not win. Dorothea Dix brought about better treatment for the insane. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, America's first woman physician, was proof that women could survive in the professional world. Some said society was beyond hope and formed idealistic communities like Brook Farm in Massachusetts, New Harmony in Indiana, and Oneida in New York.

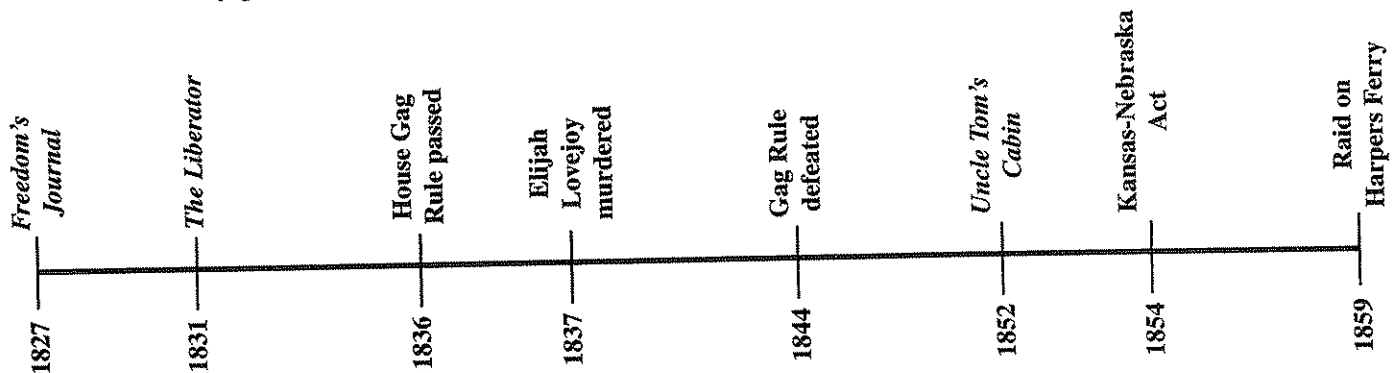
Of all reformers, none were as unpopular as abolitionists. Their goal was to end slavery, everywhere and immediately. Many admitted slavery was wrong, including some southerners, but abolitionists were more than against slavery—they wanted to destroy it and make slave-owners suffer for their terrible deeds against slaves. Many in the North did not share their views,

however; they wanted southern products like cotton and tobacco and knew they would be hard to produce without slaves. They also felt that slavery was no harder than conditions in northern factories. They argued that southern states should be left alone to work out their own policies.

The first critics of slavery were Quakers, but most did little more than say it was wrong. Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm, free African Americans, published the first African-American-owned newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, in 1827. A Quaker named Benjamin Lundy published *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* at the same time. One of his assistants, William Lloyd Garrison, thought the Quaker approach was too slow and pushed for the immediate freeing of slaves. In 1831, he started *The Liberator*, warning, "I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice." After stories spread that Nat Turner had been inspired to revolt because he had read the newspaper, Garrison got much more attention. Elijah Lovejoy, abolitionist editor of the *Alton Observer* in Illinois, was murdered by a mob in 1837.

In the 1830s, abolitionists began writing thousands of letters to Congress pushing it to act against slavery. Congress worried about these enough that the House passed the Gag Rule in 1836, which said that any protest against slavery would be tabled without discussion (in other words, totally ignored). When the postmaster general ordered that abolitionist material addressed to the South could be destroyed by postal officials, Congress did not criticize the ruling.

RESULTS: Congress ignored abolitionist petitions, and the abolitionists used this as an example of how undemocratic methods were used by the South to silence criticism. Rather than hurt the abolitionists, Congress's methods actually gained sympathy for them. In 1844, the Gag Rule was finally defeated.



Uncle Tom's Cabin Is Published

Readers laughed at Topsy's humor, trembled as Eliza escaped, and wept when Uncle Tom died. These people were imaginary, but to readers, they were real. For the first time, many began to see slaves as real people suffering terrible injustices. No novel had ever stirred such a response. The success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exceeded any ambition of its author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and its effect stirred world opinion.

Mrs. Stowe came from a family of famous ministers. Her father, Lyman Beecher, was a man of strong opinions. Her favorite brother, Henry Ward Beecher, became the most famous minister in the country. She married Calvin Stowe, a minister and professor at Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati where her father was president. To add to her husband's small salary, she wrote short stories whenever she could. However, with seven children, she was very busy.

The family often discussed slavery. To them, it was a social sin and not an individual sin. The slaveowner was caught in an evil system but might be a fine person. This view was confirmed by a visit to a Kentucky plantation where the master was kind to the slaves, but they were still property bought and sold. She met runaway slaves, and they told her about the terrible conditions they escaped. Thoughts of slavery tormented her.

In 1850, she and her husband moved to Maine where Professor Stowe taught at Bowdoin College. While visiting with her brother Edward, they talked about the Compromise of 1850, which both opposed. Her sister-in-law wrote Harriet, "If I could just use the pen as you can, I would write something that would make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is." Mrs. Stowe answered that she could do little writing because of the baby, "But I will do it at last. I will write the thing if I live."

As she sat in church one gloomy Sunday, images crossed her mind. She saw a black man being whipped, and the dying man asking God's forgiveness for those who had beaten him. She thought of escaped slaves she had met in Cincinnati and their stories. She rushed home and began to write, and when she ran out of writing paper, she wrote on a grocery sack. After writing the end of the book, she developed the other characters.

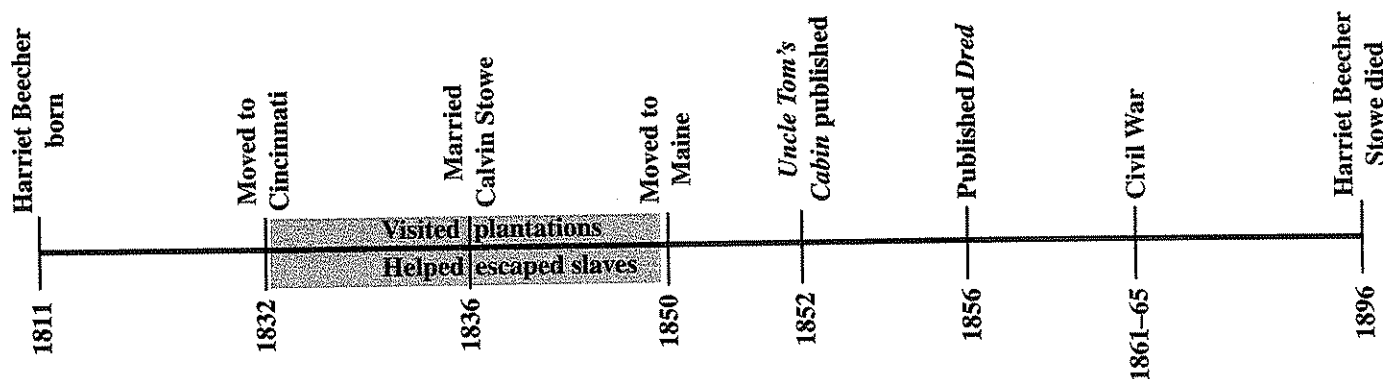
Except for Simon Legree, the whites in the book were not evil. The Shelbys, who first owned Tom, were kind, and Mrs. Shelby described slavery as "a curse to the master and a curse to the slave." St. Clare, Tom's second owner, wondered about the wisdom of beating slaves. Simon Legree, the villain of the story, was a New Englander who rejected his mother's love to live a drunken and evil life. Together with his two African-American henchmen, they made life miserable for the slaves. Uncle Tom's Christian behavior was too much for Legree, and after Tom refused to pick up a whip and beat a woman slave, he was killed by Legree's allies, Quimbo and Sambo. As Tom lay dying, the Shelbys' son came and took him home.

The story was published first in the *National Era*, then in book form.

RESULTS: The book was an instant bestseller. It sold 300,000 copies in its first year in the United States and 1.5 million copies later in England.



Harriet Beecher Stowe



John Brown Attacks Harpers Ferry

As John Brown watched the proceedings at his trial, even his friends were making him angry. They tried to defend him by saying he was insane. People had said the same thing about his mother, his aunt, his first wife, and some of his sons. It was the world that was insane, talking about slavery as if it were some legal point, or saying it was a good system or an issue with two sides. To John Brown, the fate of the African-American slave was a cause worth dying for. He often quoted the scripture: "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin."

Slavery was a technical point of law to some. Chief Justice Roger Taney in the *Dred Scott* decision (1857) denied that Congress had any power to keep slavery out of the territories and described African-Americans as an "inferior order." That same year, George Fitzhugh wrote in *Cannibals All*: "What a glorious thing to man is slavery." Hinton Helper, also a southerner, wrote *The Impending Crisis of the South*, which attacked slavery, not because it was evil for the slaves, but because it hurt the poor whites. Debates in Congress, in courts, and in books were mere words. John Brown was not a man of words, but action.



In Kansas, he led the attack on Pottawatomie Creek. After that, he traveled to Boston and talked with abolitionists. Then he returned to Kansas and used it as a base to steal slaves and horses in Missouri. In one raid, he killed a farmer who got in his way. However, a direct blow on slavery was what he really desired. He persuaded the Boston abolitionists (the Secret Six) to give him \$10,000 for his venture, and he planned his attack on the small, quiet town of Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

Located on the Potomac River, Harpers Ferry had a federal arsenal, armory, and rifle works; it was also in a slave state. His plan was to arm local slaves, which would signal a general slave rebellion. He and his new army could stay up in the mountains and fight off enemies until victory was won and the last slave was freed. He tried to persuade free African-Americans in the North to join him, but they thought the plan was too risky.

On October 16, 1859, Brown's men attacked Harpers Ferry, cut telegraph lines, and stopped the morning train. Men were sent out to bring in slaves from nearby farms and to gather a few white hostages. A free African-American who worked for the railroad tried to run away, but he was shot in the back. Brown then allowed the train to leave, and the engineer sent a message that Harpers Ferry was under attack. Colonel Robert E. Lee was sent to Harpers Ferry with some marines. By the time they arrived, Brown's men were in the engine house. After Brown turned down an offer to surrender, the marines attacked and captured the raiders.

RESULTS: Brown was tried and found guilty of treason against the state of Virginia. He told the court, "If it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life ... let it be done." He became a symbol of self-sacrifice, and as Union soldiers marched, they sang, "John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave, as we go marching on."

