



WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Selling Human Beings

In the 1800s, some Americans spoke out against slavery. They pointed to the cruelty of slave auctions, where parents could be separated from children, and husbands from wives. This letter from an enslaved woman, apparently expecting a child, to her mother gives a glimpse of the heartbreak:

“My husband is torn from me, and carried away by his master. . . . I went to see him—tried to prevail on him not to carry my husband away . . . but mother—all my entreaties and tears did not soften his hard heart. . . . A time is fast approaching when I shall want my husband and my mother, and both are gone!”

—Emily, an enslaved African American, 1836

▲ A slave auction

The Antislavery Movement

Objectives

- Describe the lives of enslaved people.
- Identify the leaders and activities of the abolitionist movement.
- Explain why many Americans opposed the abolition of slavery.

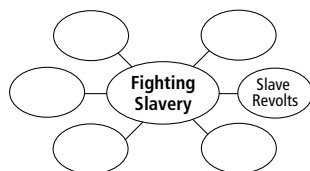
Terms and People

Nat Turner
underground railroad
Harriet Tubman
abolitionist
William Lloyd Garrison

Frederick Douglass
Angelina and Sarah
Grimké
Henry David Thoreau
civil disobedience

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Summarize As you read, summarize the ways people fought slavery.



Why It Matters In the mid-1800s, reformers tried to improve many aspects of American life. Some set out to help the most exploited people in the country: the enslaved African Americans of the South. Their efforts would feed the increasing sectional divisions between the industrial North and the agrarian South. **Section Focus Question:** What methods did Americans use to oppose slavery?

Life Under Slavery

Misgivings about slavery had been spreading across the nation since Revolutionary times. Many northerners objected to it on moral grounds. By 1804, all states north of Maryland had passed legislation to end slavery gradually. In 1807, bringing new slaves to America from Africa was banned.

Still, slavery remained an established institution in the South, where slaves formed an important part of the economy, especially with the growth of cotton farming in the early 1800s. Some two million Africans and African Americans were held as slaves from Maryland to Texas. About one third of them were children.

Enslaved People Endure Hardship Most enslaved African Americans spent their lives laboring at backbreaking tasks: picking tobacco or cotton under the hot sun, loading freight onto ships, or preparing meals in scorching kitchens. Enslaved people knew that, at any time, they could be brutally beaten or whipped or sold away from their loved ones. The most basic necessities of life—food, clothing, and shelter—were barely adequate for most enslaved people.

The miserable conditions forced on enslaved people took an inevitable toll. Some people, losing all hope, took their own lives. But, in a remarkable triumph of spirit, most enslaved people maintained their hope and dignity. Parents kept family traditions alive by naming children for beloved aunts, uncles, or grandparents, and by passing on family stories. Enslaved people took comfort in their religion, a mix of Christianity and traditional African beliefs. Religious folk songs, called spirituals, gave them strength to deal with the difficulties of their lives.

Many Resist Slavery Many enslaved people did whatever they could to fight back against their oppressors. Resistance often took the form of sabotage, such as breaking tools or outwitting overseers.


Sometimes, resistance became violent. Historians estimate that nearly 200 significant slave revolts took place in the first half of the 1800s. The best-known slave revolt took place under the leadership of **Nat Turner**. In August 1831, Turner led followers through the countryside near Richmond, Virginia, killing nearly 60 people before the local militia stopped their march. In the six-week manhunt that followed, the militia killed dozens of African Americans. Turner and his associates were eventually captured and executed.

Terrified by the idea of a successful slave revolt, southerners passed harsher laws and controls regarding slavery. Enslaved people were forbidden to gather in groups unless an overseer was present. In addition, it became illegal to teach enslaved people to read. Yet such actions did nothing to dampen the spirit of the enslaved people who were determined to resist their captivity. They also inspired some people in the North to work against slavery.

Underground Railroad Leads to Freedom

Northern foes of slavery, both black and white, risked their lives and safety to help slaves escape to freedom through a loosely organized network known as the **underground railroad**. A secret network of “conductors” hid runaway slaves in farm wagons and on riverboats and then moved them to destinations in the North or in Canada—sometimes even as far away as England. Using complex signals and hiding places, the underground railroad carried its passengers over hundreds of miles of dangerous terrain.

One of the most courageous conductors was **Harriet Tubman**, who had herself escaped slavery in Maryland. She became known as “Black Moses” because, like Moses in the Bible, she led her people out of bondage. Tubman made almost two dozen trips into the South, guiding hundreds of slaves, including her own parents, to safety. Southern planters placed a large reward on her head, but she was never captured.

 **Checkpoint** How did enslaved people resist their captivity?

The Fight Against Slavery

By the early 1800s, a growing number of Americans opposed to slavery began to speak out. Because they wanted slavery abolished, or ended, they became known as **abolitionists**.

Vocabulary Builder
inevitable—(ihn EHV ih tuh buhl)
adj. unavoidable; certain to happen

Harriet Tubman

This drawing from the 1940s captures the strength and determination of Harriet Tubman (inset) as she led enslaved people to freedom.



Garrison Demands Emancipation The most influential abolitionist was Boston printer **William Lloyd Garrison**. In 1831, Garrison began publishing an antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*. In his first issue, he proclaimed, “On this subject I do not wish to think, or speak, or write with moderation. . . . I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.” In his editorials, Garrison used dramatic language to attack slaveholders and to convince his readers that slavery was morally wrong.

Garrison favored emancipation, or the freeing of enslaved people. At first he thought, like most abolitionists, that this should be accomplished gradually to minimize economic and social disruption. But Garrison soon took the radical step of calling for immediate emancipation. He was also one of the few abolitionists to advocate the extension of full political and social rights to African Americans.

Frederick Douglass Speaks Out Perhaps the most eloquent voice against slavery was that of **Frederick Douglass**. Born into slavery, he had been taught to read and write—in defiance of the law—by his master’s wife. This taste of education led him to hate his captivity. Escaping to the North, he soon became a powerful speaker at abolitionist meetings. In 1852, Douglass was invited to speak at an Independence Day celebration. In ringing tones, he asked:

Primary Source

“Fellow citizens, pardon me, and allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I or those I represent to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? . . . 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.”

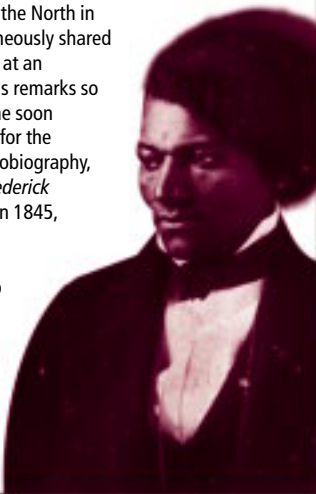
—Frederick Douglass, speech at Rochester, 1852

Douglass also wrote a best-selling autobiography and published his own abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*.

HISTORY MAKERS

Frederick Douglass (1818?–1895)

Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Maryland and escaped to the North in 1838. In 1841, he spontaneously shared his experiences as a slave at an antislavery convention. His remarks so stirred his audience that he soon became a valued speaker for the abolitionist cause. His autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, first published in 1845, reached still more people. During the Civil War, Douglass, as an adviser to President Lincoln, convinced the President to allow freedmen to fight for the North. Douglass also lent strong support to the women’s movement.




Abolitionists Organize In cities across the Northeast and the Midwest, abolitionist societies sprang up. Groups such as the American Antislavery Society printed antislavery pamphlets and distributed them to churches and other community organizations. They also supported a team of hundreds of lecturers who would speak against slavery at camp meetings and other public gatherings. They insisted that holding slaves was counter to the religious ideals that most Americans embraced.

Women played key roles in most antislavery societies. **Angelina and Sarah Grimké**, daughters of a southern slaveholder, became so outraged by slavery that they moved north to join the abolitionist movement. The Grimké sisters spoke and wrote against slavery. Angelina later married Theodore Weld, a prominent abolitionist minister.

Thoreau Promotes Civil Disobedience Some abolitionists turned to lawbreaking as a means of protest. In Massachusetts, writer and philosopher **Henry David Thoreau** spent a night in jail when he refused to pay a tax he felt supported slavery.

Later, Thoreau wrote the essay “Civil Disobedience.” Thoreau defined **civil disobedience** as the right of individuals to refuse to obey laws that they feel are unjust. Thoreau asserted that individual conscience was more important than the will of the majority: “Any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one.” Thoreau’s idea of nonviolent civil disobedience would influence such later leaders as Mohandas Gandhi of India and American civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr.

 **Checkpoint** How did Garrison and Douglass attempt to bring about the end of slavery?

Opposing Abolition

Despite the growing call of abolitionists, most Americans continued to oppose abolishing slavery. The voices opposed to abolition came from both the South and the North.

Southerners Defend Slavery In the South, slaveholders tried to prevent the spread of abolitionist ideas. Post offices refused to deliver abolitionist newspapers. As northern cries for abolition grew louder, southerners—even those who did not own slaves—developed arguments in favor of slavery.

Defenders of slavery argued that slavery was necessary because it formed the foundation of the South’s economy. In addition, slavery benefited the North, since the North’s textile and shipping industries depended upon southern cotton.

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Contrast Use a chart like the one below to contrast the different opinions held by abolitionists and people who opposed abolition.

Debate Over Slavery	
Against	For
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abolitionists believed that slavery was immoral. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slaveholders argued that slavery formed the basis of the South’s economy.

Comparing Viewpoints

Should Slavery Be Abolished?

Although the answer to the question above is obvious now, debate raged on the issue in the mid-1800s. Advocates on both sides felt passionately that they were right.

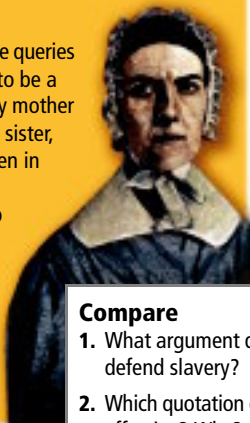
ANGELINA GRIMKÉ

Southern-born Angelina Grimké, with her sister Sarah, was a dedicated abolitionist who worked to arouse moral outrage against slavery.

Primary Source

“Let every slaveholder apply these queries to his own heart: Am I willing to be a slave . . . Am I willing to see my mother a slave, or my father, my *white* sister, or my *white* brother? If *not*, then in holding others as slaves, I am doing what I would *not* wish to be done to me . . . and thus have broken this golden rule. . . ?”

—Appeal to Christian Women of the South, 1836



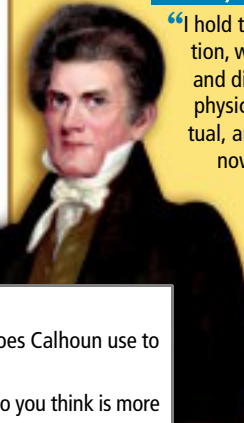
JOHN C. CALHOUN

One of the South’s most distinguished statesman, Calhoun believed that slavery was vital to America’s way of life.

Primary Source

“I hold that in the present state of civilization, where two races of different origin, and distinguished by color, and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now existing in the slaveholding States between the two, is, instead of an evil, a good—a positive good. . . . [T]here never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not . . . live on the labor of another.”

—Speech to the Senate, February 6, 1837



Compare

- What argument does Calhoun use to defend slavery?
- Which quotation do you think is more effective? Why?



A Christian Appeal

This symbol, adopted by the Society for the Abolition of Slavery in England in the 1780s, was used widely in abolitionist literature. It asks the viewer to look on slaves as brothers or sisters in Christianity.

Moreover, slaveholders maintained that slave labor was superior to the wage labor of the North. They argued that northern employers and laborers were inevitably at odds, since employers wanted workers to work more for less money while workers wanted to work less for more money. By contrast, they said, the well-being of slaves depended on their slaveholders' fortunes, while slaveholders' fortunes depended on the well-being of their slaves.

Some southerners claimed that the enslavement of Africans was historically inevitable and would eventually lead to their betterment. Such assertions were clearly racist, but many people of the time believed them.

Northerners Resist Abolition Southerners were not alone in their opposition to abolition. Many white workers in the North feared that African American competitors would take their jobs. Wealthy industrialists worried that the end of slavery would cut off the supply of southern cotton for northern textile mills and reduce the demand for ships and shipyards to provide transportation for the slave trade.

As a result, abolitionists often faced stiff resistance and even violence. In Boston, a mob dragged William Lloyd Garrison through the streets at the end of a rope. In Philadelphia, the Grimké-Weld wedding, attended by both white and black guests, so infuriated local residents that they burned down the antislavery meeting hall.

Slavery Divides the Nation Although the abolition movement remained small, it was vocal—and persistent. In 1836, southern politicians, with some northern support, passed a Gag Rule that prohibited Congress from debating the subject of abolition. The law was renewed annually for eight years. Still, former President John Quincy Adams unsuccessfully tried to win passage of a constitutional amendment prohibiting slavery.

Increasingly, slavery divided Americans like no other issue. It widened differences between the largely urban and industrialized North and the largely rural and agricultural South. Indeed, the divisive issue of slavery would soon prove to be a major factor in the division of the country itself.

 **Checkpoint** Why did many northerners oppose the abolition of slavery?

SECTION 3 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nda-0204

Comprehension

1. Terms and People Write a sentence explaining how each of the following was connected with the fight against slavery.

- Nat Turner
- underground railroad
- Harriet Tubman
- abolitionist
- William Lloyd Garrison
- Frederick Douglass
- Angelina and Sarah Grimké
- Henry David Thoreau
- civil disobedience

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Summarize Use your concept web to answer the Section Focus Question: What methods did Americans use to oppose slavery?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Write a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement introduces your topic and summarizes your main point. Write a thesis statement for an essay comparing and contrasting Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.

Critical Thinking

4. Summarize In what ways did enslaved people cope with their captivity?

5. Draw Inferences What role did religion play in the abolition movement?

6. Predict Do you think a compromise between abolitionists and slaveholders would be possible? Why or why not?