

Slavery and Abolition

MAIN IDEA

Slavery became an explosive issue, as more Americans joined reformers working to put an end to it.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The people of the United States continue to be challenged by questions of economic and social inequality.

Terms & Names

- abolition
- William Lloyd Garrison
- emancipation
- David Walker
- Frederick Douglass
- Nat Turner
- antebellum
- gag rule

One American's Story

James Forten's great-grandfather had been brought from Africa to the American colonies in chains, but James was born free. In 1781, the 15-year-old James went to sea to fight for American independence. Captured by the British and offered passage to England, the patriotic youth refused, saying, "I am here a prisoner for the liberties of my country. I never, NEVER shall prove a traitor to her interests."

By the 1830s Forten had become a wealthy sailmaker in Philadelphia, with a fortune rumored to exceed \$100,000. Though some people argued that free blacks should return to Africa, Forten disagreed and responded with sarcasm.



▲ James Forten, a wealthy leader of Philadelphia's free black community, took an active role in a variety of political causes.

A PERSONAL VOICE JAMES FORTEN

"Here I have dwelt until I am nearly sixty years of age, and have brought up and educated a family. . . . Yet some ingenious gentlemen have recently discovered that I am still an African; that a continent three thousand miles, and more, from the place where I was born, is my native country. And I am advised to go home. . . . Perhaps if I should only be set on the shore of that distant land, I should recognize all I might see there, and run at once to the old hut where my forefathers lived a hundred years ago."

—quoted in *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community 1720–1840*

Forten's unwavering belief that he was an American led him to oppose the effort to resettle free blacks in Africa and also pushed him fervently to oppose slavery.

Abolitionists Speak Out

By the 1820s more than 100 antislavery societies were advocating for resettlement of blacks in Africa—based on the belief that African Americans were an inferior race that could not coexist with white society. Yet most free blacks considered America their home, and only about 1,400 blacks emigrated to Africa between



1820 and 1830. As one black pastor from New York angrily proclaimed, “We are natives of this country. We only ask that we be treated as well as foreigners.”

African Americans increasingly were joined by whites in public criticism of slavery. White support for **abolition**, the call to outlaw slavery, was fueled by preachers like Charles G. Finney, who termed slavery “a great national sin.”

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON The most radical white abolitionist was an editor named **William Lloyd Garrison**. Active in religious reform movements in Massachusetts, Garrison started his own paper, *The Liberator*, in 1831 to deliver an uncompromising message: immediate **emancipation**—the freeing of slaves, with no payment to slaveholders.

▲ A PERSONAL VOICE WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

“[I]s there not cause for severity? I *will* be harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject [immediate emancipation], I do not wish to think or speak or write, with moderation. . . . I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.”

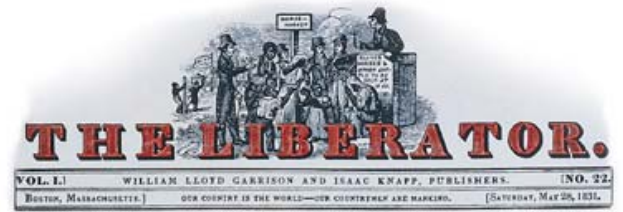
—*The Liberator*

As white abolitionists began to respond to Garrison’s ideas, he founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832, followed by the national American Anti-Slavery Society a year later. Garrison enjoyed core black support; three out of four early subscribers were African Americans. Whites who opposed abolition, however, hated him. Some whites supported abolition but opposed Garrison when he attacked churches and the government for failing to condemn slavery. Garrison alienated whites even more when he associated with fiery abolitionist David Walker.

FREE BLACKS In his *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, published in 1829, **David Walker**, a free black, advised blacks to fight for freedom rather than to wait for slave owners to end slavery. He wrote, “The man who would not fight . . . ought to be kept with all of his children or family, in slavery, or in chains, to be butchered by his cruel enemies.”

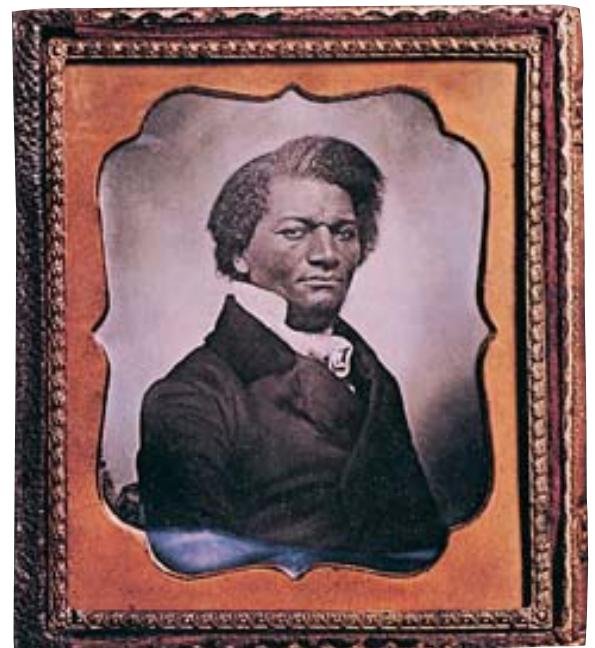
Many free blacks, more willing to compromise than Walker, had joined one of many antislavery societies active by the end of the 1820s. In 1850, most of the 434,000 free blacks in the South worked as day laborers, but some held jobs as artisans. Northern free blacks discovered that only the lowest-paying jobs were open to them. Recalling his youth in Rhode Island in the 1830s, William J. Brown wrote, “To drive carriages, carry a market basket after the boss, and brush his boots . . . was as high as a colored man could rise.” Frederick Douglass, however, rose above such limitations. **A**

FREDERICK DOUGLASS Born into slavery in 1817, **Frederick Douglass** had been taught to read and write by the wife of one of his owners. Her husband ordered her to stop teaching Douglass, however, because reading “would forever unfit him to be a slave.” When Douglass realized that knowledge could be his “pathway from slavery to freedom,” he studied even harder.



▲ William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, bore the motto: “Our country is the world—Our countrymen are all mankind.”

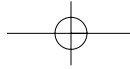
▼ Frederick Douglass, 1851



MAIN IDEA

Synthesizing

A What was radical at the time about Garrison’s and Walker’s ideas on abolition?



By 1838, Douglass held a skilled job as a ship caulker in Baltimore. He earned the top wages in the yard but was not allowed to keep any of his earnings. After a disagreement with his owner, Douglass decided to escape. Borrowing the identity of a free black sailor and carrying official papers, he reached New York and tasted freedom for the first time.

Douglass became an eager reader of *The Liberator*, which, he said, “sent a thrill of joy through my soul, such as I had never felt before.” When Garrison heard him speak of his experiences, he was so impressed he sponsored Douglass as a lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society. A superb speaker, Douglass thrilled huge audiences. “I appear before the immense assembly this evening as a thief and a robber,” he would say. “I stole this head, these limbs, this body from my master and ran off with them.” Hoping that abolition could be achieved through political actions, Douglass broke with Garrison in 1847 and began his own anti-slavery newspaper. He named it *The North Star*, after the star that guided runaway slaves to freedom. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Contrasting

B How did the various antislavery groups differ in approach?

Life Under Slavery

After 1830, Americans hotly debated the issue of slavery, but many African Americans still lived in bondage. In fact, the population of slaves in America had nearly doubled in the years between 1810 and 1830, growing from 1.2 million to roughly 2 million.

The institution of slavery had changed substantially since the 18th century. In those days, most slaves had recently arrived from the Caribbean or Africa and spoke one of several non-English languages. Most of these slaves worked on small farms alongside people with whom they could not easily communicate. By 1830, the majority had been born in America and spoke enough English to be able to communicate with other slaves. The rise of the plantation in the mid-18th century brought further change to the lives of the enslaved.

RURAL SLAVERY On large plantations, men, women, and even children toiled from dawn to dusk in the fields. The whip of the overseer or slave driver compelled them to work faster. Solomon Northup, who was born free and later enslaved, recalled the never-ending labor.

A PERSONAL VOICE SOLOMON NORTHUP

“The hands are required to be in the cotton field as soon as it is light in the morning, and, with the exception of ten or fifteen minutes, which is given them at noon to swallow their allowance of cold bacon, they are not permitted to be a moment idle until it is too dark to see, and when the moon is full, they often times labor till the middle of the night. They do not dare to stop even at dinner time, nor return to the quarters, however late it be, until the order to halt is given by the driver.”

—*Twelve Years a Slave*

By 1850 most slaves lived on plantations or large farms that employed ten or more slaves, but many lived on small farms, laboring beside their owners. Others lived and worked in the cities. **C**

URBAN SLAVERY By the 1830s the promise of cotton wealth had lured many Southern whites into farming, thus creating a shortage of white laborers for such

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

C Describe typical work experiences of rural Southern slaves.



▲ **Planters' children—like Charlotte Helen Middleton, shown with her nurse Lydia in 1857—often were tended by slaves who had been forced to give up their own children.**



Southern Plantations

Plantations were virtually self-contained, self-sufficient worlds over which owners ruled with absolute authority. Owners established the boundaries that a slave could not cross without punishment or death. But no boundary protected a slave from the owner's demands or cruel treatment.

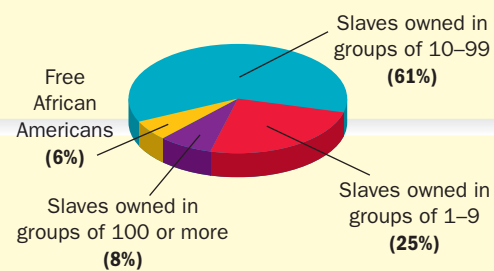


Slave quarters, from a photograph taken around 1865

industries as mining and lumber. As a result, a demand arose for slaves as workers in mills and on ships. Slaves who had developed specialized skills on plantations were now in demand in Southern cities. For example, slaves filled skilled occupations such as blacksmithing or carpentry, resulting in a new class of skilled black laborers. Most slaves lived rurally—2.8 million in 1850, compared with the 400,000 slaves living in cities. However, enslaved blacks could hire themselves out as artisans in Southern cities, often more easily than free blacks in the North, where racial discrimination prevailed.

Many enslaved women and children worked the same jobs as men in Southern industry. Slave owners “hired out” their slaves to factory owners. In return, the slave owners collected the pay of their slaves without having to supervise their activities. Thus, urban slaves spent more time beyond the watchful eye of their slave owners. Frederick Douglass remarked on differences between rural and urban slavery, noting that “a city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation. He is much better fed and clothed, and enjoys privileges altogether unknown to the slave on the plantation.” Douglass also noted that “a vestige of decency” in the cities limited the acts of “atrocious cruelty” to slaves that were common on plantations.

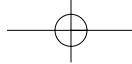
African Americans in the South, 1860



Sources: 1860 figures from *Eighth Census of the United States*; Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*.

SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs

1. According to the pie graph, what was the smallest group of African Americans living in the American South in 1860?
2. Under what conditions did 61% of slaves in the South live? Explain.



▲ Artist Felix Darley completed this tinted drawing in 1863 for a history book. Nat Turner is shown (standing) preaching to his followers.

Still slaves never lost sight of their goal of freedom. For some, it was time to take more drastic and organized action.

NAT TURNER'S REBELLION Nat Turner was born into slavery in 1800 in Southampton County, Virginia. A gifted preacher, Turner believed that he had been chosen to lead his people out of bondage. In August, 1831, Turner judged an eclipse of the sun to be a divine signal for action. With nearly 80 followers, Turner's band attacked four plantations and killed almost 60 white inhabitants before being captured by state and federal troops.

Though Turner himself hid out for several weeks, eventually he was captured, tried, and hanged. In the retaliation that

followed, whites killed as many as 200 blacks—many of them innocent of any connection with the uprising. Turner's bloody rebellion strengthened the resolve of Southern whites to defend slavery and to control their slaves.

Slave Owners Defend Slavery

In some states, in the aftermath of the Turner rebellion, people argued that the only way to prevent further slave revolts was through emancipation. Others, however, chose to tighten restrictions on all African Americans.

VIRGINIA DEBATE Virginia governor John Floyd wrote of his wish for a "law . . . gradually abolishing slavery in this State." By January 1832 the state legislature was hotly debating that very prospect. "Nothing else could have prompted [the discussions]," reported the *Richmond Enquirer*, "but the bloody massacre [Turner's Rebellion] in the month of August."

The debate over the future of slavery in Virginia resulted in a motion for abolition in the state legislature. The motion lost by a 73 to 58 vote, primarily because the state legislature was balanced toward eastern slaveholders rather than non-slaveholders in the western part of the state. That loss closed the debate on slavery in the **antebellum** (pre-Civil War) South.

BACKLASH FROM REVOLTS In addition to forcing the Virginia debate, whites' fear of future slave revolts had another important effect. Most slave owners believed that education and privilege inspired revolt. Thus, many slave owners pushed their state legislatures to further tighten controls on African Americans. These controls became known as slave codes. **D**

In 1833, for example, Alabama forbade free and enslaved blacks from preaching the gospel unless "respectable" slaveholders were present. Georgia followed suit. In 1835 North Carolina became the last Southern state to deny the vote to free blacks. In some states, free blacks lost the right to own guns, purchase alcohol, assemble in public, and testify in court. In some Southern cities, African Americans could no longer own property, learn to

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT

SLAVE REVOLTS

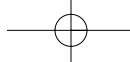
Armed rebellion was an extreme form of resistance to slavery. Nat Turner's 1831 rebellion was merely the most recent example of slave desperation.

In 1811, more than 300 slaves had rebelled in Louisiana and marched on New Orleans with spikes and axes before a well-trained militia with firearms stopped them. Gabriel Prosser had hatched a plot to take over Richmond in 1800, and Denmark Vesey had led a conspiracy to control Charleston in 1822. Both of these conspiracies were thwarted by the authorities before larger rebellions occurred.

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Effects

D How did Turner's revolt harden Southern white attitudes about basic liberties for blacks?



read and write, or work independently as carpenters or blacksmiths.

PROSLAVERY DEFENSES Some proslavery advocates used the Bible to defend slavery, citing passages that counseled servants to obey their masters. Slavery, Southern slave owners argued, actually benefited blacks by making them part of a prosperous and Christian civilization. Even Southern white Christian ministers gradually shifted toward accepting slavery during this period. Some had attacked slavery in the early 1800s, but by the 1830s most white ministers in the South agreed that slavery and Christianity could coexist.

Slave owners invented the myth of the happy slave, a cherished addition to the plantation family. To this image they contrasted that of the Northern wage slave, a wage-earning immigrant or free black who worked for pennies in dark and airless factories. George Fitzhugh, a Virginia slave owner, argued that whereas Northern mill owners fired their workers when they became too old or sick to work, Southerners cared for their slaves for a lifetime.

Abolitionists, however, continued to campaign for emancipation. One maneuver was to swamp Congress with petitions to end slavery in the District of Columbia. Southern representatives countered in 1836 by securing the adoption of a **gag rule**, a rule limiting or preventing debate on an issue—which meant that citizens submitting petitions were deprived of their right to have them heard. The gag rule eventually was repealed in 1844.

Nevertheless, as abolitionists' efforts intensified during the 1850s, some turned to violence. The more clear-sighted began to sound the alarm: this turmoil over slavery would lead to a divided nation.

WORLD STAGE

SLAVERY IN THE AMERICAS

Slaves formed a smaller portion of the total population in the American South than in the Caribbean and in Brazil. African slaves formed almost 80 percent of the population of Jamaica, a colony of Great Britain. Because so many slaves in that colony died, slave owners demanded a constant renewal of their supply from Africa, thus maintaining the Atlantic slave trade. Slavery ended in the British empire in 1833.

Brazil also had a large proportion of slaves. During the 1800s slaves made up more than half the colonial population of Brazil and worked primarily on large coffee plantations. Slavery was abolished in Brazil in 1888.

2

ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------|
| • abolition | • emancipation | • Frederick Douglass | • antebellum |
| • William Lloyd Garrison | • David Walker | • Nat Turner | • gag rule |

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

In a two-column chart, list the major antislavery and proslavery actions that occurred from 1820 to 1850.

Antislavery Actions	Proslavery Actions

Which activity do you think was most effective? Explain.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. SYNTHESIZING

Which do you think was a more effective strategy for achieving the abolitionists' goal of eliminating slavery—violence or nonviolence? Why? **Think About:**

- Garrison's and Walker's remarks
- Frederick Douglass's views
- Southerners' reactions to Nat Turner's rebellion

4. SUMMARIZING

What arguments did Southern proslavery whites employ to defend slavery?

5. COMPARING

Compare the similarities and differences between the situations of free blacks in the North and slaves in the South.