
16 "I Will Be Heard!": William Lloyd Garrison and the Struggle Against Slavery

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As we saw in the previous selection, southern whites blamed Nat Turner's insurrection on William Lloyd Garrison, insisting that Nat had somehow acquired a copy of The Liberator, Garrison's spirited abolitionist newspaper published in Boston. In the southern perception of events, the paper had driven Nat mad and caused him to revolt. Nothing was further from the truth—there is no evidence that Nat had ever even heard of The Liberator; and Garrison himself said that Nat Turner

had plenty of his own reasons to revolt. But southerners, unable to blame the insurrection on their own system, desperately needed a scapegoat. And so they pointed fingers at Garrison and his fellow northern abolitionists.

The following selection will introduce you to Garrison and the northern antislavery crusade. Garrison, however, was hardly the first abolitionist. Thomas Jefferson had hated slavery and advocated eradicating it by a gradual emancipation program. And southern and northern Quakers had opposed the institution since the colonial period. But in the 1820s—a decade of religious and political ferment—the antislavery movement truly took shape. Groups of Quakers and free blacks collected antislavery petitions and sent them to Congress, where intimidated southerners had them tabled, and Benjamin Lundy, a Baltimore Quaker, not only started publishing *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* but organized antislavery societies in the South itself. At this time, most antislavery whites (a distinct minority of the population) were both gradualists and colonizationists such as Henry Clay. But by the 1830s, some had emphatically changed their minds. They renounced colonization, demanded immediate emancipation, organized a national antislavery society, and started an abolitionist crusade that would haunt the American conscience and arouse latent racism everywhere in the land.

The best-known leader of the crusade was William Lloyd Garrison. A shy, intense, bespectacled young man who came from a broken home (his father had run away), he was raised by his mother as an ardent Baptist; later, he became a radical Christian perfectionist. Initially, Garrison too was a gradualist and a colonizer. But in 1829, after he went to work for Lundy's paper, Garrison renounced colonization and came out for immediate emancipation. In the columns of Lundy's paper, Garrison conducted a stunning moral attack against slavery and anybody who condoned or perpetuated it. For example, when he learned that a ship belonging to Francis Todd of Newburyport, Massachusetts (Garrison's hometown), was taking a cargo of slaves from Baltimore to New Orleans, Garrison castigated Todd as a highway robber and a murderer. The man, a highly respected citizen and a church deacon, slapped Garrison with a \$5,000 libel suit. The court decided against Garrison and fined him \$50, but he couldn't pay and had to go to jail. Later Garrison moved to Boston and established the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, and went on to become the most prominent, and hated, leader of the crusade against slavery.

Irã Berlin's essay captures the moral fervor of that momentous crusade and illuminates its origins. He takes us back to the Great Awakening, when people flocked to the churches to hear powerful preachers like George Whitefield, who told his flock that all human beings were equal in the eyes of God. Berlin reminds us that the democratic revolutions in America and France inspired a great many people to question the cruel practice of human bondage.

Even so, slavery by Garrison's time was firmly entrenched in the American South. Racial prejudice was prevalent in the North, too, where Berlin observes that free African Americans were denied the right "to vote, to sit on a jury, to testify in court, to carry a gun, and to travel freely." If they boarded a train, for example, white authorities forced them to sit in a segregated "colored car" in the rear.

To appreciate the incredible courage of William Lloyd Garrison, you need to understand the world in which he lived—a racist world in which the rights of property, including property in slaves, were often more important than human rights. It took a man of great inner strength to argue, in public, that the sweat and blood of African Americans had helped build this country, that slavery was a "sin" that must be abolished immediately, and that the emancipated blacks, after a period of instruction, must be assimilated into the American social order. These views were

extremely unpopular in all parts of the country, and Garrison's life was constantly threatened. When he was on the platform, furious opponents of the abolitionist cause screamed at him and struck him with stones and rotten eggs. Once, in Boston, a mob threatened to hang him, dragging him through the street with a rope around his neck. Yet Garrison refused to temper his words or to renounce his cause. In the end, his noble crusade was successful.

GLOSSARY

ABOLITIONIST A person devoted to freeing the slaves, gradually with the cooperation of the South, immediately through nonviolent moral pressure (Garrison's methodology), or through bloodshed (the preferred approach of John Brown and David Walker). Those who sought an immediate end to slavery argued that they were assaulting a sinful institution.

ALLEN, RICHARD A former slave who eventually purchased his own freedom, he formed the first separate church in which African Americans could worship without facing discrimination. He opposed the American Colonization Society and argued that former slaves should stay in the country their labor had helped build.

AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY A national organization that Garrison helped form in 1833, it abandoned colonization and embraced immediate emancipation.

AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY A private organization founded in 1816 for the purpose of resettling "free persons of color" outside the United States. Although this was not an abolitionist enterprise, many members hoped to persuade the southern states to abolish slavery by promising to remove the liberated blacks to other lands. Liberia, on the western coast of Africa, was their most successful colonization site. Eventually twelve thousand African Americans sought refuge there.

BIRNEY, JAMES G. A Kentucky slaveowner and Alabama solicitor general who freed his slaves, relocated in the North, joined the abolitionist movement, and became the presidential candidate of the Liberty party in 1840 and 1844. He headed the first presidential platform dedicated to the elimination of slavery.

FEDERALIST This political party developed during the administration of George Washington. It supported a strong national government, a sound currency, and a pro-British foreign policy. The death of its leader Alexander Hamilton and its unpopular dissent during the War of 1812 relegated the party to only local influence in a few New England strongholds.

FORTEN, JAMES An African American leader and sail maker who resided in Philadelphia. His subscriptions to *The Liberator* helped launch Garrison's newspaper. Referring to the American Colonization Society as "a slaveholders' trick," he influenced Garrison to oppose the controversial organization.

GRADUAL EMANCIPATION See GRADUALISM.

GRADUALISM The idea that slavery should be eliminated over an extended period. In Garrison's day, there were various plans for gradual emancipation; many of them coupled with colonization of the freed blacks and fair compensation to slave owners for their loss. A Pennsylvania statute contained a variation of such a plan. The measure decreed that the children of slaves born in Pennsylvania after 1780 were to be freed when they reached their twenty-eighth birthday.

GREAT AWAKENING A Protestant revival movement that swept through the colonies in the eighteenth century and that was led by charismatic ministers like George Whitefield. As a result of this movement, church attendance dramatically increased; and Garrison's mother was one of many drawn to its evangelical brand of morality.

THE LIBERATOR Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, first published in Boston on January 1, 1831. Although it never had a circulation of more than a few thousand, its message frightened the slaveholding South and attracted reformers in the North to the antislavery cause.

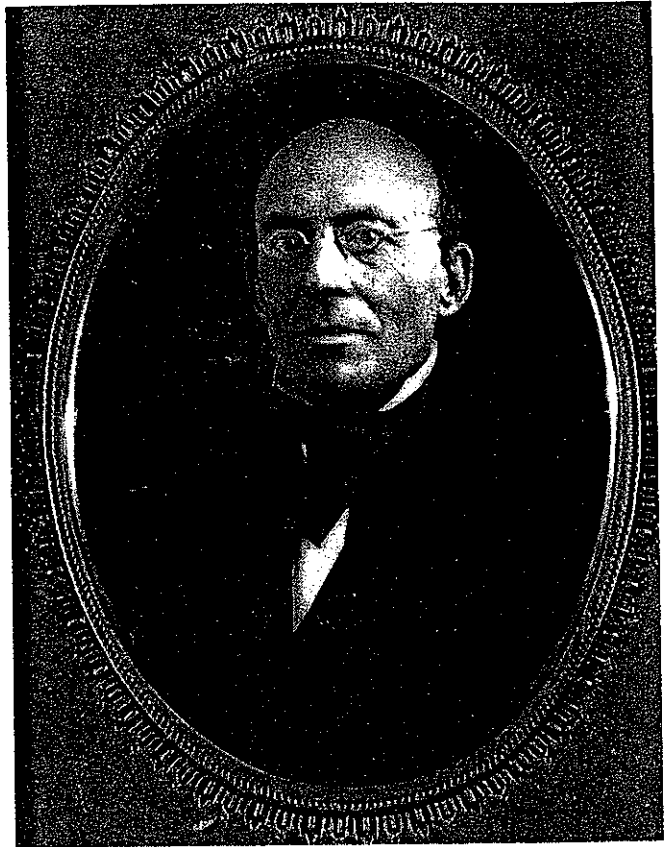
LUNDY, BENJAMIN The Quaker publisher of *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* who took on Garrison as a "junior partner." Although their collaborative effort was short-lived, it gave Garrison an appreciation of the antislavery movement and the power of the printed word.

WALKER, DAVID A free African American revolutionary who wrote the *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, a pamphlet that urged slaves to revolt.

Save for the annual turning of the calendar, January 1, 1831, seemed little different than any other wintry day in Boston. There seemed nothing remarkable, for instance, about the slight balding young man who walked briskly past the Bunker Hill monument, Faneuil Hall, and other remembrances of America's revolutionary past. Nor did anyone notice that his pace quickened as he turned into Merchants' Hall, or that he mounted the stairs to a nondescript print shop with a mixture of determination and expectation. For more than a week, William Lloyd Garrison—along with his partner, Isaac Knapp, and several of their friends—had been setting type for a new journal that they all hoped would strike a blow at slavery, an evil that degraded millions of Americans and corrupted tens of millions more. For Garrison and his friends, chattel bondage denied the slaves' humanity and contradicted the principles of the Declaration of Independence as well as the precepts of Jesus Christ. *The Liberator*, they believed, would elevate the slaves and thus restore the nation's highest ideals.

Driven by the belief that all people were created equal and all created in God's image, Garrison worked on through the day, polishing his inaugural editorial. As he put the finishing touches on the first issue of *The Liberator*, Garrison reflected on the enormous task before him. Perhaps to steel himself as well as to assure readers of the depth of his commitment, he concluded the editorial with a ringing affirmation: "I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD."

When the issue was at last ready to go to press, Garrison emblazoned the masthead with the words, "OUR COUNTRY IS THE WORLD—OUR COUNTRYMEN MANKIND," capturing the universalism that would characterize his life's work. Now he needed only the cash for paper, ink, and a few other necessary supplies. Fortunately, the arrival of an advance payment



William Lloyd Garrison, celebrated abolitionist and editor of the controversial Liberator. "I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice," wrote Garrison in his manifesto in the first issue of The Liberator. On the subject of slavery, "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." (Department of Special Collections, Wichita State University Library)

for some twenty-five subscriptions—courtesy of his friend James Forten, a black Philadelphia sail maker—made it possible for Garrison to proceed.

Publication of a radical abolitionist journal was a strange mission for the young man born in December 1805 in the small seaside town of Newburyport, Massachusetts. During the 1780s, through a series of judicial decisions, slavery had been abolished in Massachusetts. So, as a boy, Garrison could have had no direct knowledge of slavery. Nor could he have known many people of African descent, for scarcely a few dozen resided in his hometown. In addition,

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the tone of the first issue of *The Liberator* seemed out of character with the twenty-five-year-old who wrote it, for there was nothing in Garrison's physical appearance or demeanor to suggest the steadfast resolve that would lead him to press his beliefs to their logical conclusion.

The tensile strength that Garrison brought to *The Liberator* had been annealed in most unpromising beginnings. In the early nineteenth century, Adijah and Frances Garrison had migrated to Newburyport from the Maritime Provinces of Canada, seeking economic opportunity and a congenial community for their evangelical beliefs. They found little of the former but much of the latter, for Newburyport had been deeply touched by the Great Awakening and its aftermath. Sadly, though, the expansion of Boston had leached the town of its prosperity, making it increasingly difficult for Adijah Garrison to support his growing family. The maritime depression that accompanied the War of 1812 left him unemployed, impoverished, and depressed. He turned to drink and eventually deserted his family, leaving his wife and four young children destitute. Frances Garrison, fortified by her evangelical faith, labored mightily to sustain her children. But, in time, she was forced to place them with kindly neighbors and fellow congregants. Her youngest son, William, was apprenticed to the publisher of the *Newburyport Herald*.

Young William Lloyd Garrison loved the craft of printing as well as the world of words and ideas that sprang from the presses. He read voraciously, which compensated for his lack of formal education, and occasionally tried his hand at poetry and some fiction. But the *Herald* was a Federalist sheet that emphasized politics, and it was from the *Herald* that Garrison took his first political ideas, combining them with an exuberant idealism that had its roots in the radicalism of the American Revolution. (His first public utterance—delivered on July 4, 1824, at a meeting of the local debating society—celebrated the global expansion of American revolutionary principles as “freedom’s awakening triumphant call.”) Garrison’s views were also shaped by his mother’s

evangelical moralism and his own stiff-necked sense of rectitude. Principle, not expedience, would be his guide, and the identification and eradication of sin his quest.

This heady mixture manifested itself when, upon completing his apprenticeship in 1825, the nineteen-year-old Garrison took up the editorship of his own newspaper in Newburyport. Before long, he was denouncing Thomas Jefferson as “the great Lama of Infidelity” (for Jefferson’s flirtation with deism) and proclaiming his own continuing attachment to the Federalist party, even though it had lost its electoral franchise nearly a decade earlier. In championing the candidacies of the few remaining Federalists, Garrison demonstrated his resolute commitment to loyalty no matter the cost, but as his candidates failed, so did his editorship. In 1828, with the collapse of his journalistic career in Newburyport, Garrison left for new opportunities in Boston.

While Garrison’s unfashionable attachment to Federalism won him few new friends, his moralism gained him entry into Boston’s expanding universe of benevolent reform. On the rise in Boston were Christian missionaries, temperance advocates, pacifists, vegetarians, and proponents of all manner of human betterment from feminism to socialism. As yet another foot soldier in the evangelical war against sin, Garrison quickly secured the editorship of a temperance journal and, when that publication also failed, attached himself to a kindly Quaker named Benjamin Lundy, the peripatetic publisher of an irregular antislavery sheet grandly entitled *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*.

For years, Lundy had traveled the slave states making the case for abolition. Carrying (almost literally) his press on his back, he lived from hand to mouth as he published his journal. For the most part, he labored in near-total anonymity, unnoticed except by like-minded members of the Society of Friends and appreciative people of color. Accepting Garrison as a junior partner marked a sharp break for Lundy, who was very much a loner. In fact, the association did not last long, but it was fateful, because in Lundy’s

cause Garrison found his life's work and in Lundy's methods he found his own metier. Garrison's egalitarianism and moralism gained a new, clearer direction as he came to appreciate through Lundy the evil that was chattel bondage.

Opposition to slavery was itself relatively new in the United States, as it was everywhere in the world. Until the end of the eighteenth century, slavery had few principled enemies. From antiquity onward, nearly every society practiced slavery, and every authority—religious and secular—sanctioned it, often with elaborate codes affirming the legitimacy of the slave master's rule. In a world where hierarchy was ubiquitous and inequality the norm, slavery had long been considered at one with God and nature, and few voices were raised against slave ownership.

The American and French revolutions changed that. The doctrine that "all men are created equal," asserted first in the American Declaration of Independence and then reiterated in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, initiated a transformation of slavery from a universally accepted convention for extracting labor and assuring obedience into a hideous relic of the past. Henceforth, it was not equality that would be the anomaly but slavery. In the new United States, leading revolutionaries—Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin, to name just the most prominent—condemned slavery. Some, like Jefferson, bemoaned it while continuing to exercise the practice; others, like Washington, freed their slaves; still others, like Franklin, formed manumission societies and urged slavery's total liquidation.

Yet slavery survived and flourished, even as its legitimacy was called into question. At the end of the Revolution, it could still be found in every part of the new United States, deeply rooted at the base of the American economy and tightly woven into the fabric of society. Even in the northern states, opposition to slavery remained a novelty, and abolitionists moved with caution. Although slavery fell quickly in northern New England, where slaves were numerically few and their labor economically marginal, emancipation proved more difficult in southern New

England and the middle-Atlantic states. The 1780 Pennsylvania Emancipation Act freed not a single slave on emancipation day—March 1 of that year—and proposed to eliminate slavery only by freeing the children of slaves born thereafter once they reached the age of twenty-eight. Moreover, at the time of the enactment of the Pennsylvania statute, the legal liquidation of slavery had not yet begun at all in Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, or the largest northern slave state, New York.

As in Pennsylvania, emancipationists in these states dared not challenge slavery directly; instead, they settled for the gradual, piecemeal emancipation of slaves, while assuring grumbling slaveholders of fair compensation for their lost property. Gradualism therefore guaranteed that the death of slavery in the North would take not years, or even decades, but generations to accomplish. More important, it signaled the impossibility of abolition in the South, where slaves were more numerous and believed to be an essential element of the plantation economy. Indeed, even as the work of abolition commenced, the number of slaves in the United States grew, increasing from about half a million at the beginning of the American Revolution to well over one million by 1810.

The feeble nature of the assault on slavery had much to do with the fact that slavery had become identified with people of African descent. Whatever white Americans thought of slavery in principle, they had no desire to live with black people who were free. As many white Americans explained it, circumstance—the very experience of enslavement—had degraded black people, making them unfit for full participation in the new republic. And some whites simply believed that black people ranked below them on the scale of civilization.

White slaveholders, who had a deep material interest in chattel bondage, made much of this perceived inferiority of black people as well as the feared destabilizing effects of emancipation. They promoted the ideas that free blacks would not work, that they would demand political rights and seize power, and that they would intermarry with whites

and destroy white posterity. Perhaps even more telling is that many of the white opponents of slavery shared these sentiments. The very laws that liberated northern slaves often carried with them proscriptions regarding the liberty of former slaves, denying them the rights to vote, to sit on a jury, to testify in court, to carry a gun, and to travel freely. And where legislative enactments dared not tread, informal practice (newly established, but anointed with the force of custom) served the same function. By general consensus, white employers barred free blacks from trades they once practiced openly as slaves, and white citizens denied them entry into public places, excluding them from churches, schools, and militia musters. Some communities "warned out" free people of color, and when they would not leave voluntarily, they were often ridiculed and assaulted, physically as well as verbally. The desire to rid the nation of black people—particularly free blacks—spurred a movement to deport or "colonize" them, with Africa being the logical destination.

The obstacles faced by free blacks in the young republic led some opponents of slavery, styling themselves realists, to conclude that abolition was possible only upon removal—or, in their words, "pending repatriation." The realists denied any racial animus toward people of African descent. Indeed, they maintained that once repatriated, black people could enjoy without prejudice the rights promised by the Declaration of Independence. African Americans transported to Africa would not only regain their birthright, it was believed; they would also become agents of the expansion of American republicanism, Christianity, and commercial capitalism. With the founding of the American Colonization Society in 1817 and the establishment of the colony of Liberia soon thereafter, "Negro removal" became the central feature of American antislavery activity.

Yet colonization had other faces. Some advocates simply wanted to rid the United States of all its black people. Many of these were white supremacists who despised people of color. Other colonizationists were slaveholders who wanted to deport free blacks and thereby strengthen the institution of slavery. These

people believed that eliminating free blacks would allow slaves to be content with their lot, making them better workers and more obedient servants. By depriving slaves of a model of black freedom, the threat of servile insurrection would also likely wither—assuring white slaveholders of economic prosperity, political stability, and an undiluted posterity.

For their part, black people had no doubt about the meaning of colonization. To them, colonization was little more than a plot to perpetuate chattel bondage and bolster white supremacy. Asserting their claims to American nationality, many denounced the logic of repatriation. "This is our home, and this is our country," proclaimed a coalition of black Philadelphians led by James Forten and Bishop Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. "Beneath its sod lie the bones of our fathers; for it some of them fought, bled, and died. Here we were born, and here we will die."

Like many other opponents of slavery, Benjamin Lundy was wedded to the colonizationist cause as the only practical means of securing the slaves' freedom. But Garrison had no such attachment, and as he accompanied Lundy around the nation, the pair of them proselytizing against slavery, Garrison discovered that the alleged beneficiaries of colonization wanted nothing to do with the scheme. He listened ever more attentively as men like Forten and Allen denounced colonization as a slaveholders' trick, and he found himself swept up by the power of their logic: If black people could be free and equal in Africa, why not in America? In this way, the African-American critique of colonization (and black people's demand for equality) became central to Garrison's understanding of slavery and race. He carried these ideas with him when he returned to Boston and made them his own. Thereafter, black people became his strongest supporters and most loyal allies.

The inaugural issue of *The Liberator* borrowed much from the protests of black leaders. Apologizing for his previous support of the "pernicious doctrine of gradual abolition"—a belief he now admitted to be

“full of timidity, injustice, and absurdity”—Garrison demanded an immediate end to slavery and the resurrection of the principles asserted in the Declaration of Independence. In condemning slavery as a sin, he unsheathed the weapons that would become the signatures of his egalitarian campaign. There would be no groveling for political favor, with the implicit willingness to compromise—for the immoral nature of slavery would not allow for compromise. There would be no call for slaves to rise up and throw off their chains, with the explicit threat of bloodshed—for violence would beget only more violence. Instead, there would be relentless reassertion of the principle of human equality and persistent denunciation of the evil of slaveholding. White and black could not be distinguished in the eyes of God; therefore, they should not be distinguished in the eyes of the law. Is it possible that “all men are born equal, and entitled to equal protection, excepting those whose skins are black and hair wooly?” *The Liberator* editorialized. Garrison then concluded his opening editorial with this stern warning:

I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, 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; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen;—but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present.

The first issue of *The Liberator* sparked a small fire that grew, as more issues were published, into a blaze extinguished only by civil war. In the process, Garrison forced a nation to confront, for the first time, its most pressing moral dilemma—race—and inspired a tradition of social commitment and moral agitation that became a model for others from Frederick Douglass to Martin Luther King Jr. He also personified the difference between conventional partisan politics (which seeks, through the process of compromise, to identify a mutually acceptable middle ground) and movement politics (which stakes out a principled

position on the periphery and then attempts to draw conventional politicians to its cause). Lastly, Garrison elevated the work of social reform into a profession, which men and women from Susan B. Anthony to Ralph Nader would find worthy as an occupation. On that New Year’s Day in 1831, though, Garrison’s work was just beginning.

When compared to the stirring editorial, the rest of *The Liberator’s* first issue seems relatively tame. There were poems, short stories, meditations, and pleas for subscribers. Garrison published the text of a petition against slavery in the nation’s capital, then being circulated in Boston, and urged readers to sign it. He also reprinted an article on the District of Columbia slave trade (taken from a Washington newspaper) that, like the petition, emphasized how slavery in the seat of their national government made hypocrites of all Americans. “That District,” Garrison sneered, “is rotten with the plague, and stinks in the nostrils of the world.” Elsewhere, he announced a fifty-dollar prize for the best essay on “The Duties of Ministers and Churches of all denominations to avoid the stain of Slavery.” Garrison informed his readers of the arrival in North Carolina of *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, a pamphlet written by black revolutionary David Walker urging black people to rise up against slavery and racial subordination, and he took note of several other matters of local and national import. But the miscellany that filled the back pages of *The Liberator* hardly disguised its single-minded preoccupation.

The appearance of *The Liberator* challenged not only the institution of slavery in the South but also the antislavery movement in the North and the structure of racial inequality upon which both rested. In doing so, it naturally aroused opposition of the sort one might expect from such a radical assault on the foundations of American society and the conventions of master over slave, white over black. The same year that *The Liberator* appeared, the District of Columbia tried to prevent its circulation by prohibiting free blacks from removing copies from the post office. Meanwhile in Raleigh, North Carolina,

a grand jury indicted Garrison for distributing incendiary literature, and the Georgia legislature offered a five-thousand-dollar bounty for anyone arresting Garrison and bringing him to the state to face charges of libel. Other threats emerged closer to home as Garrison was pelted with eggs and epithets; condemned as a fanatic, lunatic, and worse; and, according to one account, targeted for assassination. In October 1835, an antiabolitionist mob shouting "Hang him on the Commons" nearly lynched Garrison on the streets of Boston.

But Garrison did not frighten easily. Unmoved by the torrent of abuse, he gathered around him a small group of disciples attracted by the depth of his egalitarian commitment and his unshakable willingness to defend his principles against all comers. For the most part, his followers were young men and women—among them Lydia Marie Child, Abbey Kelly, Samuel May, and Henry C. Wright—who took seriously the promise of the American republic. Like Garrison, they were appalled by the nation's failure to practice the ideals it celebrated and by the rank injustice they believed was rooted in a government whose founding charter delayed the close of the slave trade for two decades, required the return of fugitive slaves, and assigned slaves the status of only three-fifths of a man. Using *The Liberator* as their platform, they denounced the republic, its founders, and its icons. Declaring the Constitution "a covenant with death and agreement with hell," they publicly burned copies to demonstrate their contempt for the government that most Americans believed represented the apotheosis of liberty.

Beyond this small coterie, at least at first, the Garrisonian assault on slavery won few converts. But the issuance of *The Liberator* broke the silence on slavery—for if Lundy's opposition to chattel bondage was barely audible, Garrison's broadcasts could not be escaped. *The Liberator* also removed colonization as a legitimate avenue of antislavery activity, eventually replacing it with the principle of immediate emancipation. Already by 1833, when the Garrisonians established the American Anti-Slavery Society, their leader had become the

central figure in the war against chattel bondage and *The Liberator* the unparalleled voice of the antislavery movement.

In the years that followed, Garrison's influence extended beyond the radicals he had initially attracted into the moderate reform community at large. These newcomers to the antislavery cause included many who did not share Garrison's animosity toward both the American republic and conventional political partisanship. Rather than repudiate the Constitution, they embraced it and worked within its system to build political parties that might overturn slavery through electoral means. Noting that the Constitution never actually used the word *slave*, they aimed to restore what they claimed to be the Founding Fathers' antislavery intent. By 1840, political abolitionists such as Joshua Giddings of Ohio and William Slade of Vermont had used antislavery platforms to secure seats in Congress, and that same year James G. Birney ran for president as the candidate of the Liberty party, the first political party dedicated to the eradication of slavery.

Although Garrison distanced himself from politicians who wanted to ride the antislavery issue to power and blistered political abolitionists for their willingness to dance with the devil, he did nothing to discourage their assault on slavery. On occasion, he even raised a glass of ice water to toast their successes, making it clear for whom he would have voted (if he had considered it ethical to vote under the present system, which he did not). Likewise, antislavery politicians tended to keep their distance from Garrison and his followers; yet none would deny the strength they all drew from the assault on slavery he had unleashed on January 1, 1831. In late 1864, soon after his reelection, Abraham Lincoln invited Garrison to the White House. Later, the president was heard to remark that he considered himself "only an instrument" in the struggle for emancipation, adding, "The logic and moral power of Garrison and the antislavery people of the country and the army, have done it all." *The Liberator* had been heard.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1 Born in New England with no first-hand knowledge of slavery and little contact with individuals of African descent, Garrison had an unusual background for a man who so ardently opposed slavery. What do you think motivated Garrison to vigorously support a cause that was not popular even in the North?

2 Berlin states that until the end of the eighteenth century there were relatively few opponents of slavery. Many Americans, in fact, argued that the cruel institution was consistent with God and nature. How did the American and French Revolutions change attitudes toward slavery? Founding fathers like Jefferson, Franklin, and Washington all had their doubts about forced human bondage. Explain how each developed a different approach toward slavery.

3 How do we know that racial prejudice toward African Americans was not limited to the American South? Describe some of the restrictions faced by

liberated northern slaves. Also describe the fears that southern whites had if emancipation ever became a reality.

4 The American Colonization Society was a controversial and greatly misunderstood organization. Why did most slaveowners support it and most African Americans oppose it? How did Garrison's opinion of it change as he preached against slavery across the country?

5 Why did Garrison oppose the gradual emancipation doctrine that other abolitionists supported? Did he feel that violence was necessary to end slavery? What was your reaction when you learned that the abolitionist movement varied greatly in strategy and tactics?

6 How did the South react to the publication of *The Liberator*? Was the mood of the North any less emotional? Why do you think that a newspaper with a relatively small circulation would cause such a great uproar?