

The Abolitionists

In national politics, Southerners chiefly sought protection and enlargement of the interests represented by the cotton/slavery system. They sought territorial expansion because the wastefulness of cultivating a single crop, cotton, rapidly exhausted the soil, increasing the need for new fertile lands. Moreover, new territory would establish a basis for additional slave states to offset the admission of new free states. Antislavery Northerners saw in the Southern view a conspiracy for proslavery aggrandizement. In the 1830s their opposition became fierce.

An earlier antislavery movement, an offshoot of the American Revolution, had won its last victory in 1808 when Congress abolished the slave trade with Africa. Thereafter, opposition came largely from the Quakers, who kept up a mild but ineffectual protest. Meanwhile, the cotton gin and westward expansion into the Mississippi delta region created an increasing demand for slaves.

The abolitionist movement that emerged in the early 1830s was combative, uncompromising, and insistent upon an immediate end to slavery. This approach found a leader in William Lloyd Garrison, a young man from Massachusetts, who combined the

heroism of a martyr with the crusading zeal of a demagogue. On January 1, 1831, Garrison produced the first issue of his newspaper, *The Liberator*, which bore the announcement: "I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population. ... On this subject, 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."

Garrison's sensational methods awakened Northerners to the evil in an institution many had long come to regard as unchangeable. He sought to hold up to public gaze the most repulsive aspects of slavery and to castigate slave holders as torturers and traffickers in human life. He recognized no rights of the masters, acknowledged no compromise, tolerated no delay. Other abolitionists, unwilling to subscribe to his law-defying tactics, held that reform should be accomplished by legal and peaceful means. Garrison was joined by another powerful voice, that of Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave who galvanized Northern audiences. Theodore Dwight Weld and many other abolitionists crusaded against slavery in the states of the old Northwest Territory with evangelical zeal.

One activity of the movement involved helping slaves escape to safe refuges in the North or over the border into Canada. The "Underground Railroad," an elaborate network of secret routes, was firmly established in the 1830s in all parts of the North. In Ohio alone, from 1830 to 1860, as many as 40,000 fugitive slaves were helped to freedom. The number of local antislavery societies increased at such a rate that by 1838 there were about 1,350 with a membership of perhaps 250,000.

Most Northerners nonetheless either held themselves aloof from the abolitionist movement or actively opposed it. In 1837, for example, a mob attacked and killed the antislavery editor Elijah P. Lovejoy in Alton, Illinois. Still, Southern repression of free speech allowed the abolitionists to link the slavery issue with the cause of civil liberties for whites. In 1835 an angry mob destroyed abolitionist literature in the Charleston, South Carolina, post office. When the postmaster-general stated he would not enforce delivery of abolitionist material, bitter debates ensued in Congress. Abolitionists flooded Congress with petitions calling for action against slavery. In 1836 the House voted to table such petitions automatically, thus effectively killing them. Former President John Quincy Adams, elected to the House of Representatives in 1830, fought this so-called gag rule as a violation of the First Amendment, finally winning its repeal in 1844.

1. Why did Southerners seek territorial expansion?

2. Describe the abolitionist movement that emerged in the early 1830s.

3. What was the name of William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper?

4. What escaped slave galvanized northern audiences?

5. Describe the Underground Railroad.

6. Describe the "so-called gag rule" against petitions calling for action against slavery.

Biography

Frederick Douglass

- **Occupation:** Abolitionist, civil rights activist, and writer
- **Born:** February 1818 in Talbot County, Maryland
- **Died:** February 20, 1895 in Washington, D.C.
- **Best known for:** Former slave who became an advisor to the presidents

Biography:

Where did Frederick Douglass grow up?

Frederick Douglass was born on a plantation in Talbot County, Maryland. His mother was a [slave](#) and when Frederick was born, he became a slave, too. His birth name was Frederick Bailey. He did not know who his father was or the exact date of his birth. He later picked February 14 to celebrate as his birthday and estimated that he was born in 1818.

Life as a Slave

Life as a slave was very difficult, especially for a child. At the young age of seven Frederick was sent to live at the Wye House plantation. He seldom saw his mother who died when he was ten years old. A few years later, he was sent to serve the Auld family in Baltimore.

Learning to Read

Around the age of twelve, his master's wife, Sophia Auld began to teach Frederick the alphabet. It was against the law at that time to teach slaves to read and when Mr. Auld found out, he forbid his wife to continue teaching Douglass. However, Frederick was an intelligent young man and wanted to learn to read. Over time, he secretly taught himself to read and write by observing others and watching the white children in their studies.

Once Douglass had learned to read, he read newspapers and other articles about slavery. He began to form views on human rights and how people should be treated. He also taught other slaves how to read, but this eventually got him into trouble. He was moved to another farm where he was beaten by the slave owner in an effort to break his spirit. However, this only strengthened Douglass' resolve to gain his freedom.

Escape to Freedom

In 1838, Douglass carefully planned his escape. He disguised himself as a sailor and carried papers that showed he was a free black seaman. On September 3, 1838 he boarded a train to the north. After 24 hours of travel, Douglass arrived in New York a free man. It was at this point

that he married his first wife, Anna Murray, and took the last name Douglass. Douglas and Anna settled down in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Abolitionist

In Massachusetts, Douglass met with people who were against slavery. These people were called abolitionists because they wanted to "abolish" slavery. Frederick began to speak at meetings about his experiences as a slave. He was an excellent speaker and moved people with his story. He became famous, but this also put him in danger of being captured by his former slave owners. To avoid being captured, Douglass traveled to Ireland and Britain where he continued to speak to people about slavery.

Author

Douglass wrote down his story of slavery in an autobiography called *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. The book became a bestseller. Later, he would write two more stories of his life including *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.

Women's Rights

In addition to speaking out for the freedom of slaves, Douglass believed in the equal rights of all people. He was outspoken in his support for women's right to vote. He worked with women's rights activists such as [Elizabeth Cady Stanton](#) and attended the first ever women's rights convention that was held at Seneca Falls, New York in 1848.

Civil War

During the [Civil War](#), Douglass fought for the rights of black soldiers. When the South announced that they would execute or enslave any captured black soldiers, Douglass insisted that [President Lincoln](#) respond. Eventually, Lincoln warned the Confederacy that for every Union prisoner killed, he would execute a rebel soldier. Douglass also visited with the U.S. Congress and President Lincoln insisting on equal pay and treatment of black soldiers fighting in the war.

Death and Legacy

Douglass died on February 20, 1895 from either a heart attack or a stroke. His legacy lives on, however, in his writings and many monuments such as the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge and the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site.

Interesting Facts about Frederick Douglass

- Douglass was married to his first wife Anna for 44 years before she died. They had five children.
- John Brown tried to get Douglass to participate in the [raid on Harpers Ferry](#), but Douglass thought it was a bad idea.
- He was once nominated for Vice President of the United States by the Equal Rights Party.
- He worked with President [Andrew Johnson](#) on the subject of black suffrage (the right to vote).
- He once said that "No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck."

Comprehension Questions

Directions: Select the best answer based off the reading of Fredrick Douglass.

1) Where was Frederick Douglass born?

- a. Maryland
- b. Arkansas
- c. Connecticut
- d. Massachusetts
- e. Virginia

2. Which of the following best describes Frederick Douglass' life as a child?

- a. A happy childhood growing up with family
- b. A free child who worked hard on his parents farm
- c. A rich child who went to the best schools
- d. A slave who moved and hardly knew his parents
- e. None of the above

3. How did Frederick Douglass learn to read?

- a. is master taught him how
- b. He mostly taught himself
- c. He went to the local school
- d. He learned from the other slaves
- e. His mother taught him how

4. True or False: Slave owners were encouraged to educate their slaves and teach them

how to read and write.

- a. TRUE
- b. FALSE

5. What disguise did Frederick Douglass use during his escape from slavery?

- a. Soldier
- b. Engineer
- c. Blacksmith
- d. Tailor
- e. Sailor

6. When did Frederick Douglass take the last name 'Douglass'?

- a. He was born with it
- b. When he was seven
- c. When he finished writing his first book
- d. After he became a free man
- e. After the Civil War

7. What did abolitionists want to put an end to?

- a. Alcoholic beverages
- b. Eating meat
- c. Slavery
- d. The Civil War
- e. The Union of the United States

8. What famous convention did Frederick Douglass attend in Seneca Falls, New York?

- a. The first women's rights convention
- b. The abolitionists convention
- c. The black freemen convention
- d. The Thirteenth Amendment convention
- e. The first convention for Native American rights

9. What did President Lincoln do in order to protect black soldiers in the Civil War?

- a. He agreed that black soldiers would not fight on the front lines

- b. He refused to allow black soldiers to fight
- c. He gave them the best weapons and uniforms
- d. He warned the South that for every Union prisoner killed, he would execute a rebel soldier
- e. He did nothing.

10. What U.S. President did Frederick Douglass work with to help get black men the right to vote?

- a. Abraham Lincoln
- b. Lyndon B. Johnson
- c. Andrew Jackson
- d. Teddy Roosevelt
- e. Andrew Johnson

Name _____

Date _____

HARRIET TUBMAN Reading Comprehension

Harriet Tubman was one of the most famous American women in history. She was born on March 10, 1821, in Dorchester County, Maryland, the daughter of slaves on a Maryland plantation. Her original name was Araminta Ross, and she was nicknamed "Minty." From an early age, she worked as a servant at the plantation house. As a teenager, she suffered a vicious head wound as she tried to protect a fellow slave from a beating. According to legend, the woman who was beating the other slave hurled a two-pound weight, hitting Harriet in the head. Her injury would haunt her for the remainder of her life, resulting in periodic fainting spells.

Tubman spent her early life as a slave. In 1844, she married a free black man named John Tubman, who would prove disloyal. Life as a slave was extremely difficult. They were forced to work in the merciless heat without rest. They were often beaten and forced to live in poor conditions. In the early and mid 1800s, slaves were often sold to Southern plantations where they would never have contact with their families again. Harriet was a particularly strong and powerful woman who could be sold for a hefty sum. Fearing that she was about to be sold, Harriet resolved to run away. Despite the brutal punishment that would be inflicted upon her if she was caught, Harriet took off in the middle of the night sometime in 1849 and headed north to freedom. She gained assistance along the way by abolitionist Quaker families who hung specially designed carpets or lights on the outside of their houses as a sign that runaway slaves were welcome and would receive help. She traveled by night through the dense woodlands of Maryland, guided north by the North Star and the moss that grew on the north side of the trees. She eventually made it to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a free city where she landed a job and saved money. After living in Philadelphia for two years, Harriet decided to return to Maryland, in the hopes of freeing her family members. She succeeded in guiding her sister and mother to freedom along the same path that she had taken. This path became known as the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a network of woodland paths scattered throughout parts of the South that led to freedom in the North. Harriet returned again and guided her father and brother to freedom.

Soon, Harriet became known as the "conductor" on the Underground Railroad and made more daring trips to the South to guide more slaves to their freedom. Harriet devised strategies to trick various parties that tried to capture her. If she was traveling with a baby, she would use herbal drugs to ensure it didn't cry. She made sure that she traveled on Saturdays as "runaway notices" in Southern newspapers could not be printed until Monday. Harriet's daring "forays" continued to elude slave hunters who were offered huge bounties for returning slaves to their owners. By 1856, a \$40,000 bounty was placed on her capture—dead or alive. She became a serious threat to Southern plantation owners who made large investments in their slaves. In one famous story, Harriet was close to being captured at a bus station. To avoid capture, she pulled out a book and pretended to read. Since nearly all slaves were illiterate, the hunters simply ignored her and continued their search.

By 1860, Tubman was said to have completed 19 successful journeys on the Underground Railroad, freeing as many as 300 slaves. She was never captured, nor were any of her "passengers." During the Civil War, she served as a cook, nurse, and spy for the Union Army. After the war, she settled in Troy, New York, where she would die in 1913.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- 1.) Which of the following was an EFFECT of Harriet's head injury?
 - a.) She suffered from fainting spells.
 - b.) She became a conductor on the Underground Railroad.
 - c.) She married a free black man.
 - d.) She was sold to another family

- 2.) Which of the following best describes the Underground Railroad?
 - a.) A network of trains and railroad tracks that led slaves to freedom in the North
 - b.) A network of paths and forest trails that led slaves to freedom in the West
 - c.) A network of paths and forest trails that led slaves to freedom in the South
 - d.) A network of paths and forest trails that led slaves to freedom in the North.

- 3.) Which of the following did Harriet NOT take into consideration in her quest for freedom?
 - a.) The position of the North Star
 - b.) The disappointment of her owners when they learned she had runaway
 - c.) Specially designed carpets on the outsides of houses friendly to runaway slaves
 - d.) The tendency of moss to grow on the north side of trees

- 4.) Which of the following questions is answered in the last paragraph?
 - a.) Was Harriet Tubman able to read or write?
 - b.) How did Harriet Tubman contribute to the Union Army in the Civil War?
 - c.) How did Harriet Tubman avoid capture on the Underground Railroad?
 - d.) What happened to Harriet's husband?

- 5.) Who helped Harriet in her escape to freedom?
 - a.) the people of Maryland
 - b.) her husband
 - c.) Quaker families
 - d.) the police

- 6.) Harriet Tubman suffered a head injury while...
 - a.) Falling.
 - b.) lifting heavy weights.
 - c.) working in the fields.
 - d.) protecting a fellow slave

- 7.) Harriet Tubman helped as many as _____ slaves to their freedom.
 - a.) 300

- b.) 40,000
- c.) 40
- d.) 100

8.) Why did Harriet Tubman travel on Saturdays?

- a.) Because runaway notices would be printed on Sundays
- b.) Because she was too tired during the work week
- c.) To get a head start on the runaway notices that would appear in Monday newspapers
- d.) Because slave hunters never worked on Saturdays

9. Why did Harriet Tubman ultimately run away from her owners?

- a.) She was very strong
- b.) To reunite with her husband
- c.) She was afraid she would be sold
- d.) To find better pay in the North

10.) What does the word "illiterate" mean in the following sentence? Since nearly all slaves were illiterate, the hunters simply ignored her and continued their search.

- a.) captured
- b.) unable to read or write
- c.) slow
- d.) quiet