

## The Abolitionists

<b>Abolitionist</b>	How did the individual become involved in the abolitionist cause?	What actions did the individual take in ending slavery? Did he/she support violent or non-violent tactics?	What other details of the person's life do you think is important? Did he or she support other causes? Explain
William Lloyd Garrison			
Frederick Douglass			
John Brown			
Harriet Tubman			
Harriet Beecher Stowe			

## JOHN BROWN

John Brown was born into a deeply religious family in Torrington, Connecticut, in 1800. Led by a father who was vehemently opposed to slavery, the family moved to northern Ohio when John was five, to a district that would become known for its antislavery views.

During his first fifty years, Brown moved about the country, settling in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York, and taking along his ever-growing family. (He would father twenty children.) Working at various times as a farmer, wool merchant, tanner, and land speculator, he never was financially successful -- he even filed for bankruptcy when in his forties. His lack of funds, however, did not keep him from supporting the rights of African-Americans. He gave land to fugitive slaves. He and his wife agreed to raise a black youth as one of their own. He also participated in the Underground Railroad and, in 1851, helped establish the League of Gileadites, an organization that worked to protect escaped slaves from slave catchers.

Brown moved to the black community of North Elba, New York, in 1849. The community had been established thanks to the philanthropy of Gerrit Smith, who donated tracts of at least 50 acres to black families willing to clear and farm the land. Brown, knowing that many of the families were finding life in this isolated area difficult, offered to establish his own farm there as well, in order to lead the blacks by his example and to act as a "kind father to them."

Despite his contributions to the antislavery cause, Brown did not emerge as a figure of major significance until 1855 after he followed five of his sons to the Kansas territory. There, he became the leader of antislavery guerillas and fought a proslavery attack against the antislavery town of Lawrence. The following year, in retribution for another attack, Brown went to a proslavery town and brutally killed five of its settlers. Brown and his sons would continue to fight in the territory and in Missouri for the rest of the year.

Brown returned to the east and began to think more seriously about his plan for a war in Virginia against slavery. He sought money to fund an "army" he would lead. On October 16, 1859, he set his plan to action when he and 21 other men -- 5 blacks and 16 whites -- raided the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry.

Brown was wounded and quickly captured, and moved to Charlestown, Virginia, where he was tried and convicted of treason against the state of Virginia.

Although initially shocked by Brown's exploits, many Northerners began to speak favorably of the militant abolitionist. "He did not recognize unjust human laws, but resisted them as he was bid. . . .," said Henry David Thoreau in an address to the citizens of Concord, Massachusetts. "No man in America has ever stood up so persistently and effectively for the dignity of human nature. . . ."

John Brown was hanged on December 2, 1859

## WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

The son of a merchant sailing master, William Lloyd Garrison was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1805. In 1808 William's father deserted the family, forcing them to scrounge for food from more prosperous families and forcing William to work, selling homemade molasses candy and delivering wood.

In 1818, after suffering through various apprenticeships, Garrison began work for the Newburyport Herald as a writer and editor. This job and subsequent newspaper jobs would give the young Garrison the skills he would utilize so expertly when he later published his own paper.

When he was 25, Garrison joined the Abolition movement. He became associated with the American Colonization Society, an organization that believed free blacks should emigrate to a territory on the west coast of Africa. At first glance the society seemed to promote the freedom and happiness of blacks. There certainly were members who encouraged the manumission (granting of freedom) to slaves. However, it turned out that the number of members advocating manumission constituted a minority. Most members had no wish to free slaves; their goal was only to reduce the numbers of free blacks in the country and thus help preserve the institution of slavery.

By 1830 Garrison had rejected the programs of the American Colonization Society. By this time he had worked as co-editor of an antislavery paper started by Benjamin Lundy in Maryland, *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*. And on January 1, 1831, he published the first issue of his own anti-slavery newspaper, the *Liberator*.

In speaking engagements and through the *Liberator* and other publications, Garrison advocated the immediate emancipation of all slaves. This was an unpopular view during the 1830s, even with northerners who were against slavery. What would become of all the freed slaves? Certainly they could not assimilate into American society, they thought. Garrison believed that they could assimilate. He believed that, in time, all blacks would be equal in every way to the country's white citizens. They, too, were Americans and entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Though circulation of the *Liberator* was relatively limited -- there were less than 400 subscriptions during the paper's second year -- Garrison soon gained a reputation for being the most radical of abolitionists. Still, his approach to emancipation stressed nonviolence and passive resistance, and he did attract a following. In 1833 he helped organize the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Garrison was unyielding and steadfast in his beliefs and represented the radical end of the abolitionist spectrum.. He believed that the Anti-Slavery Society should not align itself with any political party. He believed that women should be allowed to participate in the Anti-Slavery Society. He believed that the U.S. Constitution was a pro-slavery document. He believed in the dissolution (break up) of the Union. Many within the Society differed with these positions, however, and in 1840 there was a major rift in the Society which resulted in the founding of two additional organizations: the Liberty Party, a political organization, and the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which did not admit women.

## FREDERICK DOUGLASS

The son of a slave woman and an unknown white man, "Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey" was born in February of 1818 on Maryland's eastern shore. He spent his early years with his grandparents and with an aunt, seeing his mother only four or five times before her death when he was seven. (All Douglass knew of his father was that he was white.) During this time he was exposed to the degradations of slavery, witnessing firsthand brutal whippings and spending much time cold and hungry. When he was eight he was sent to Baltimore to live with a ship carpenter named Hugh Auld. There he learned to read and first heard the words abolition and abolitionists. "Going to live at Baltimore," Douglass would later say, "laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity."

Douglass spent seven relatively comfortable years in Baltimore before being sent back to the country, where he was hired out to a farm run by a notoriously brutal "slavebreaker" named Edward Covey. And the treatment he received was indeed brutal. Whipped daily and barely fed, Douglass was "broken in body, soul, and spirit."

On January 1, 1836, Douglass made a resolution that he would be free by the end of the year. He planned an escape. But early in April he was jailed after his plan was discovered. Two years later, while living in Baltimore and working at a shipyard, Douglass would finally realize his dream: he fled the city on September 3, 1838. Travelling by train, then steamboat, then train, he arrived in New York City the following day. Several weeks later he had settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, living with his newlywed bride (whom he met in Baltimore and married in New York) under his new name, Frederick Douglass.

Always striving to educate himself, Douglass continued his reading. He joined various organizations in New Bedford, including a black church. He attended Abolitionists' meetings. He subscribed to William Lloyd Garrison's weekly journal, the *Liberator*. In 1841, he saw Garrison speak at the Bristol Anti-Slavery Society's annual meeting. Douglass was inspired by the speaker, later stating, "no face and form ever impressed me with such sentiments [the hatred of slavery] as did those of William Lloyd Garrison." Garrison, too, was impressed with Douglass, mentioning him in the *Liberator*. Several days later Douglass gave his speech at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society's annual convention in Nantucket-- the speech described at the top of this page. Of the speech, one correspondent reported, "Flinty hearts were pierced, and cold ones melted by his eloquence." Before leaving the island, Douglass was asked to become a lecturer for the Society for three years. It was the launch of a career that would continue throughout Douglass' long life.

Despite apprehensions that the information might endanger his freedom, Douglass published his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written By Himself*. The year was 1845. Three years later, after a speaking tour of England, Ireland, and Scotland, Douglass published the first issue of the *North Star*, a four-page weekly, out of Rochester, New York.

Unlike abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, Douglass did not advocate the dissolution of the Union, since it would isolate slaves in the South. This led to a bitter dispute between Garrison and Douglass that, despite the efforts of others such as Harriet Beecher Stowe to reconcile the two, would last into the Civil War.

Frederick Douglass would continue his active involvement to better the lives of African Americans. He conferred with Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and recruited northern blacks for the Union Army. After the War he fought for the rights of women and African Americans alike.

## HARRIET TUBMAN

Harriet Tubman is perhaps the most well-known of all the Underground Railroad's "conductors." During a ten-year span she made 19 trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom. And, as she once proudly pointed out to Frederick Douglass, in all of her journeys she "never lost a single passenger."

Tubman was born a slave in Maryland's Dorchester County around 1820. At age five or six, she began to work as a house servant. Seven years later she was sent to work in the fields. While she was still in her early teens, she suffered an injury that would follow her for the rest of her life. Always ready to stand up for someone else, Tubman blocked a doorway to protect another field hand from an angry overseer. The overseer picked up and threw a two-pound weight at the field hand. It fell short, striking Tubman on the head. She never fully recovered from the blow, which subjected her to spells in which she would fall into a deep sleep.

Around 1844 she married a free black named John Tubman and took his last name. (She was born Araminta Ross; she later changed her first name to Harriet, after her mother.) In 1849, in fear that she, along with the other slaves on the plantation, was to be sold, Tubman resolved to run away. She set out one night on foot. With some assistance from a friendly white woman, Tubman was on her way. She followed the North Star by night, making her way to Pennsylvania and soon after to Philadelphia, where she found work and saved her money. The following year she returned to Maryland and escorted her sister and her sister's two children to freedom. She made the dangerous trip back to the South soon after to rescue her brother and two other men. On her third return, she went after her husband, only to find he had taken another wife. Undeterred, she found other slaves seeking freedom and escorted them to the North.

Tubman returned to the South again and again. She devised clever techniques that helped make her "forays" successful, including using the master's horse and buggy for the first leg of the journey; leaving on a Saturday night, since runaway notices couldn't be placed in newspapers until Monday morning; turning about and heading south if she encountered possible slave hunters; and carrying a drug to use on a baby if its crying might put the fugitives in danger. Tubman even carried a gun which she used to threaten the fugitives if they became too tired or decided to turn back, telling them, "You'll be free or die."

By 1856, Tubman's capture would have brought a \$40,000 reward from the South. On one occasion, she overheard some men reading her wanted poster, which stated that she was illiterate. She promptly pulled out a book and feigned reading it. The ploy was enough to fool the men.

Tubman had made the perilous trip to slave country 19 times by 1860, including one especially challenging journey in which she rescued her 70-year-old parents. Of the famed heroine, who became known as "Moses," Frederick Douglass said, "Excepting John Brown -- of sacred memory -- I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than [Harriet Tubman]." And John Brown, who conferred with "General Tubman" about his plans to raid Harpers Ferry, once said that she was "one of the bravest persons on this continent."

Becoming friends with the leading abolitionists of the day, Tubman took part in antislavery meetings. On the way to such a meeting in Boston in 1860, in an incident in Troy, New York, she helped a fugitive slave who had been captured.

During the Civil War Harriet Tubman worked for the Union as a cook, a nurse, and even a spy. After the war she settled in Auburn, New York, where she would spend the rest of her long life. She died in 1913.

## HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

Daughter of Minister Lyman Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe was a noted abolitionist and author, best known for her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

The Beecher family valued education, and Harriet attended Hartford Female Seminary, run by her older sister Catharine. At the age of 21, she moved with her father to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he became president of Lane Theological Seminary. At age 23, she published her first story in *Western Monthly Magazine*. In Cincinnati, she fell in love with Calvin Ellis Stowe, a professor and ardent abolitionist. The two wed in 1836 and remained married for the next 50 years.

Located close to the border of the slave state Kentucky, the city of Cincinnati gave Stowe direct exposure to the institution of slavery. She visited Kentucky and witnessed slavery firsthand; she heard first-person accounts from former slaves who had escaped North on the Underground Railroad. Among the abolitionists she befriended was John Rankin, whose home was an important stop on the railroad. When Stowe and her husband discovered that their house servant, Zillah, was a former slave, the couple helped her to escape to Canada.

In 1850, the Stowes moved to Brunswick, Maine, where Calvin had accepted a position at Bowdoin College. That same year, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law, which enabled slave owners to reclaim their runaway slaves who had escaped to Northern states. Stowe was outraged and soon began to write her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, drawing on freedom narratives, newspaper accounts, interviews with former slaves and conversations with participants in the Underground Railroad, both white and black. She also drew on her own personal experience as a mother. Her son Charlie had died in the summer of 1849. Four years after his death, she wrote to a friend:

I have been the mother of seven children, the most beautiful and most loved of whom lies buried near my Cincinnati residence. It was at his dying bed and at his grave that I learned what a poor slave mother may feel when her child is torn away from her. In those depths of sorrow, which seemed to be immeasurable, it was my only prayer to God that such anguish might not be suffered in vain. ... I allude to this here because I have often felt that much that is in that book had its root in the awful scenes and bitter sorrow of that summer.

Stowe wrote a searing indictment of slavery, a narrative with vivid characters that put a face on the institution. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* first appeared in serial form in an abolitionist newspaper, *The National Era*, and was then published in book form in 1852. The book sold 10,000 copies in its first week and 1.5 million copies in one year. Translated into foreign languages, it sold around the world and was made into a popular play. In the United States, Stowe's work galvanized anti-slavery sentiment and aided the abolitionist cause.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* turned Stowe into a celebrity. When she visited the White House, President Abraham Lincoln allegedly remarked, "So you are the little lady who started this big war." She and her husband moved to Andover, Mass., where Calvin accepted a position at Andover Theological Seminary. When he retired in 1864, the Stowes moved to Hartford, Conn., where Harriet Beecher Stowe built her dream house, Oakholm. She died in 1896; later that year, 16 volumes of her writings were published under the title *The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe*.