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## THE ABOLITION MOVEMENT AND THE AMERICAN DREAM\*

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As President Carter said in his inaugural address, the United States has indeed been an idealistic nation. Its ideal was first clearly and succinctly set down in the Declaration of Independence. The founders of the first republic of the world declared: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Since then, the Americans have sincerely believed with President Lincoln that their country was "conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."<sup>1</sup> Either produced or reenforced by the aspirations of the early pioneers, the experience of settling a vast wilderness, the natural law doctrine of the Enlightenment, and the teachings of evangelical religion, the principle of freedom and equality has become the most

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1 "Gettysburg Address," in Henry Steele Commager, ed., *Documents of American History* (New York, 1934), I, 428.

cherished ideal of the Americans. It was based on an honest recognition of the worth and dignity of the individual and his equal right to develop his own capabilities to better his conditions. From this premise, it naturally followed that only a democratic form of government could best ensure and protect the individual and his liberties. The Americans have never been tired of reiterating these beliefs.

However, they are not mere believers or dreamers. They are doers, resolved to put those beloved principles into practice. They started the revolution to achieve independence, made the federal constitution to “form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity,”<sup>2</sup> enacted bills of rights to guarantee and protect the civil rights of the people, carried out political and social reforms to broaden political participation, eliminate social injustice, and provide greater equality and freedom for all. They were so successful that a French traveler observed as early as 1834 that the American society was “essentially and radically a democracy, not in name merely but in deed.”<sup>3</sup> And Alexis de Tocqueville, the young French aristocrat who visited the United States in 1831-1832 for a study of American democracy, opened the introduction to his great book, *Democracy in America*, by saying, “Among the novel objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, nothing struck me more forcibly than the general equality of condition among the people.”<sup>4</sup> Led by an optimistic faith in the perfectability of human beings and their institutions and aided by a favorable environment, the Americans moved steadily toward the goals of their dream.

Yet, in spite of the fact that all these principles were coated in universal terms, in practice they were applied to only

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<sup>2</sup> The preamble of the Constitution of the United States, in *ibid.*, I, 139.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Chevalier, *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States; Being a Series of Letters on North America* (1839), p. 187.

<sup>4</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1945), I, 3.

a part of the American people. The blessings of democracy were not shared by all. While white Americans enjoyed greater and greater equality, freedom and justice, black Americans were gradually deprived of the basic rights as men and reduced to human chattels.

The presence of Negroes in North America was almost as old as the first English settlements in the coastal areas. In 1619, a Dutch man of war brought the first cargo of twenty "negars" to Virginia. From there Negroes spread first to the southern and then to the middle and northern colonies. At first Negroes were treated more or less like white servants. They were not chattel slaves from the beginning. Negro slavery was built only "little by little, step by step, choice after choice, over a period of many years"<sup>5</sup> by "men who sought greater return than they could obtain from their own labor alone, and who found other types of labor more expensive."<sup>6</sup> Although Maryland and Virginia began to make the first legal sanctions for enslaving Negroes in the mid-seventeenth century, legal slavery did not come into being until the eighteenth century. The Negro slaves were denied civil liberties, deprived of all legal protections and ruthlessly exploited by their masters. Cut off from their African home and without access to the white culture, they lived aimlessly in a cultural vacuum and in endless labor as nothing more than beasts.

The plight of the slave naturally touched men of a tender heart. Protest against slavery thus began almost with its establishment. The early opposition to Negro slavery was led chiefly by Quakers. The principle of universal love and brotherhood of all men before God made the Friends natural foes of human bondage. However, their crusade against slavery was rather mild in comparison with that of a later age. They either stopped at writing pamphlets or essays condemning slavery or demanded only gradual emancipation and transportation of

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the freedmen to some region beyond the Alleghenies. In any case, theirs was a lonely voice in wilderness. As a result, they did not achieve much in converting people to the antislavery cause. But they did keep alive some sort of antislavery sentiments.

Then, came the Revolution. Swept by the revolutionary spirit, the northern and middle states except Delaware sooner or later abolished slavery or provided gradual emancipation of slaves. Congress prohibited slavery in the old Northwest in 1787 and stopped the African slave trade in 1808. The South, where slaves were more numerous than elsewhere and thus had a greater economic implication, did nothing immediately to end human bondage. But even in the South antislavery sentiment was strong during the revolutionary years. Southerners tolerated slavery only as a necessary evil, hoping that some day in the near future, it would be finally done away with.

However, later development of events turned against their expectation. With the invention of the cotton gin, cotton production spread rapidly from the tidewater South to the Southwest. Cotton soon replaced tobacco as the chief staple of the South. Because the crude slave labor suited the work on the cotton plantation quite well, slavery spread and grew with cotton cultivation and soon became the very foundation of the economy, society and, indeed, the whole culture of the South. With slavery's growing importance in their life, the opinion of Southerners also underwent a profound change. Antislavery sentiments declined. As early as 1814, Thomas Jefferson wrote to his young neighbor Edward Coles, who told him his hope that slavery could be eliminated, that "your solitary but welcome voice is the first which has brought this sound to my ears."<sup>7</sup> And the debate in the Virginia legislature in 1832 became the last public discussion of slavery in the South. From then on until the final emancipation in 1863, southern critics of its peculiar institution were either silenced or driven out by

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Edward Coles, 25 August, 1814, in Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds., *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1944), pp. 641-642.

public persecution or the lynch law. All the Southerners united in one voice declaring that slavery was "instead of an evil, a good—a positive good."<sup>8</sup> The freedom of conscience and the freedom of expression were thus sacrificed on the altar of the now sacred institution of slavery, and the South was determined to protect it by all means.

With the stamping out of criticism in the South, antislavery agitation could be hoped for only in the North. Yet, preoccupied with the second war with Britain and with making fortunes by taking advantage of the economic opportunities provided by the opening up of the West and with the growing industry, and prevented by the widespread racial bias, the Northerners also had less interest in the antislavery cause than their founding fathers. Luther Martin had already noticed in the Philadelphia constitutional convention that "when our own liberties were at stake, we warmly felt for the common rights of men," but when such danger passed, "we are daily growing more insensible to those rights."<sup>9</sup> As early as 1806, some Rhode Island antislavery men already observed that members of "the young and rising generation" were less hostile toward slavery than the older men of the revolutionary generation had been.<sup>10</sup> Although a few humanitarians and Quakers, notably Benjamin Lundy, carried on the crusade against slavery, their criticisms fell on unresponsive ears. The only effort to end slavery during the years before 1831 which drew some support was the racism-ridden and equally cruel and futile colonization movement. As a result, the period from 1808 to 1831 has been generally considered "years of quiescence in the slavery controversy, years of indifference or of preoccupation with other things."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> John C. Calhoun's words, quoted in John M. Blum and others, *The National Experience* (New York, 1963), p. 254.

<sup>9</sup> Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven, Conn., 1937), III, 212.

<sup>10</sup> "Minutes," 1806, American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (Philadelphia, 1806), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (New York, 1944), p. 470.

Then, the mild antislavery of the early years suddenly went militant in the early 1830's. The question of the reasons for this change has been highly controversial. Many explanations have been put forward. But the one which emphasizes the reforming zeal released by humanitarianism, the revolutionary ideals, the puritan idea of social conscience, and particularly, Revivalism seems to be more generally accepted than the others.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever the reasons might have been, the beginning of the militant phase of the antislavery movement was marked by the appearance of the *Liberator* on January 1, 1831, published by an obscure figure named William Lloyd Garrison in Boston. The first editorial on the front page set the aggressive tone of abolitionism. Garrison explained the reasons for his change from "the popular but pernicious doctrine of gradual abolition" to immediate emancipation and declared his determination "at every hazard, to lift up the standard, of emancipation in the eyes of the nation . . . until every chain be broken, and every bondsman set free." "Assenting to the self-evident truth maintained in the American Declaration of Independence," he would "strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population." He did not want moderation in this urgent matter. He said:

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. . . . I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.<sup>13</sup>

He was heard, but at the beginning only by a few people. The circulation of the *Liberator* had never been large. Few white men subscribed it. Most of its readers were free Negroes in the North. When asked by the South to take action against Garrison and his paper late in 1831, Mayor Harrison Gray Otis of Boston admitted that he had not previously even known of their existence.

Yet, the appearance of the *Liberator* was not without

<sup>12</sup> Tung-hsun Sun, *Historians and the Abolition Movement* (Taipei, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> *The Liberator*, January 1, 1831.

significance. It marked the turning point in the long antislavery movement. Issue after issue, it exposed the injustice and cruelties of slavery and denounced the evils of slaveholders and their northern cooperators in strong and sometimes even abusive language. It unequivocally and aggressively upheld the principles of the Declaration of Independence and demanded the immediate, unconditional and universal emancipation of all slaves. By appealing directly to the conscience, it pricked the Northerners to think again about slavery. While provoking strong reactions from pro-slavery elements, it broke up the "conspiracy of silence" with which slavery had been protected. Thus, with the publication of the *Liberator*, the antislavery movement entered its more aggressive and more radical phase.

After establishing the *Liberator*, Garrison and his fifteen converts organized the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832, which he was to dominate throughout his career. According to its constitution, the new society favored "immediate freedom from personal bondage of whatsoever kind" and pledged itself to proceed "by peaceful and lawful means." Its fundamental aims were to work for immediate emancipation of slaves and to improve free Negroes' character and condition as well as rights and privileges.<sup>14</sup> Believing in the mighty power of their principles, the members of the organization were to shake the nation by their crusade.

Having the *Liberator* as his forum and backed by an organization, Garrison lashed out mercilessly at slavery, slaveholders, and all those who opposed him and his cause in often unrestrained and diabolical language. Soon the *Liberator* became the most notorious antislavery newspaper and Garrison the most notorious antislavery crusader. His unguarded language, uncompromising stand and radical opinions provoked bitter antagonism and denunciation not only from among his contemporaries but also from among historians. He was denounced as visionary, impractical, unreasonable, abusive,

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Walter M. Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of Wm. Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 58-59.

incendiary, self-centered, extreme, vagrant, a dead weight to the abolition movement.<sup>15</sup> Yet his positive contributions to the antislavery cause could never be completely denied. Even his most severe critic conceded that he was a man of principle and the embodiment of devotion to a cause.<sup>16</sup> Another hostile historian admitted: "His strong, relentless championship of human rights; his refusal to recognize distinctions of color or race with respect to ability, achievement, and rights; his condemnation of every sort of injustice were an encouragement and a blessing to an oppressed people which can not be measured but was very great."<sup>17</sup> By relentlessly pricking the conscience, he destroyed the brutal colonization scheme, unmasked the southern pro-slavery forces and their northern counterparts, and shattered the complacency of Northerners with the status quo and forced them to strive for the high standard he set. For all these, Louis Filler is right in regarding him as outranking the other abolitionists "one and all as . . . an antislavery symbol, in his own time and after."<sup>18</sup>

However, Garrison and his followers were not the only abolitionists. At about the same time as Garrison launched his crusade against slavery, a more moderate and yet more influential antislavery group appeared in the West under the leadership of two wealthy New York merchants and humanitarians, Lewis and Arthur Tappan, and a western reformer, Theodore Weld. They were all the converts of the great Revivalist, Charles G. Finney. Urged by his emphasis on benevolence as "a controlling preference of the mind," this "holy band" set out to save "the American church and nation from the judgments of heaven" by "a spirit of expansive benevolence."<sup>19</sup> They became universal reformers. But later they concentrated

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<sup>15</sup> For the different treatments of Garrison by historians, see Tung-hsun Sun, *Historians and the Abolition Movement*.

<sup>16</sup> Gilbert H. Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York, 1933), pp. 98-99.

<sup>17</sup> Dwight L. Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1961), p. 174.

<sup>18</sup> *The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860* (New York, 1960), p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse*, p. 16.



their reforming zeal on the one evil which violated the Christian principles and American ideals the most seriously: slavery. Because of its spiritual origin, this western group of abolitionists showed a close parallel to Revivalism in conducting its crusade against slavery.<sup>20</sup>

In 1833 the two groups and other antislavery forces merged together to form the American Anti-Slavery Society to coordinate and direct the nation-wide campaign against the peculiar institution of the South. The constitution of the national organization affirmed the principle that "slaveholding is a heinous crime in the sight of God, and that the duty, safety, and best interests of all concerned, require its immediate abandonment," and pledged itself to "the entire abolition of slavery in the United States."<sup>21</sup>

Now, the abolitionists had a national organization to agitate their cause and to achieve their aim, immediate emancipation.<sup>22</sup> They were humanitarians with a deep conviction of the worth of the individual, of the equality of all men and of their rights to enjoy all the civil liberties. They held that there was no greater degradation for the individual than the auction block and no greater violation of the dignity and the natural rights of man than human bondage. They maintained

that no man has a right to enslave or imbrute his brother—to hold or acknowledge him, for one moment, as a piece of merchandise—to keep back his hire by fraud—or to brutalize his mind by denying him the means of intellectual, social, and moral improvement.

The right to enjoy liberty is inalienable. . . . Every man has a right to his

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>21</sup> In Commager, ed., *Documents of American History*, I, 279.

<sup>22</sup> There were several versions of "immediatism." According to Barnes, to Garrison, immediate emancipation meant exactly what the term signified; to Tappan's committee of gentlemen, it meant "immediate abolition, gradually accomplished." But it was defined by the debate held among the students of the Lane Seminary as "gradual emancipation, immediately began." See his *The Antislavery Impulse*, pp. 48-49, 66-67 and 102-103. However, at least in the early years, Garrison was less radical than Barnes thought him to be, for he said in the *Libertor* for January 7, 1832: "Immediate abolition does not mean that the slaves shall immediately exercise the right of suffrage . . . or be free from the benevolent restraints of guardianship."

own body—to the products of his own labor—to the protection of law—and to the common advantages of society. It is piracy to buy or steal a native African and subject him to servitude . . . .

That the slaves ought instantly to be set free and brought under the protection of law; . . .<sup>23</sup>

“Devoted to the highest ideals of equality and democracy, influenced by the best in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and all that was good and noble in the thought and actions of the Founding Fathers,”<sup>24</sup> these men and women keenly felt obliged to destroy the institution of slavery.

But the abolitionists were peaceful men. They disavowed violence as a means of achieving their purpose. In the first number of the *Liberator*, Garrison already warned the slaves:

Not by sword shall your deliverance be;  
Not by the shedding of your masters' blood.

The constitutions of both the New England and the American Anti-Slavery Society refused to use force. Instead the abolitionists adopted the method of moral suasion. This is made clear in the Declaration of Sentiments of the American Anti-Slavery Society. “Ours,” it declared, “is a moral crusade” to lift in the land “the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty, of rebuke.” “Ours shall be such only as the opposition of moral purity to moral corruption—the destruction of error by the potency of truth—the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love — and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, they were to use arguments, rebukes and denunciations to persuade people that slavery was a sin and its being such that they should repent immediately. Their appeal was therefore primarily to the conscience. In this

<sup>23</sup> “The Declaration of Sentiments” of the American Anti-Slavery Society, in Thomas A. Bailey, ed., *The American Spirit* (Lexington, Mass., 1963), I, 363-364.

<sup>24</sup> Louis Ruchames, ed., *A John Brown Reader* (New York, 1959), “Introduction,” p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Russell B. Nye, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Humanitarian Reformers* (Boston, 1955), p. 72.

sense, abolitionism was essentially a moral and intellectual movement.

Because of their emphasis on moral suasion, the abolitionists have been accused of being impractical. But protected by the constitution and federal laws, there was in fact no other way to reach slavery. Besides, it was also the most effective method because it hit the most vulnerable spot of the slaveholders, their own conscience.<sup>26</sup> It is true that the abolitionists provided no workable program of emancipation. But they believed that if the public could once be convinced of the evils of slavery and of the necessity of doing something about it at once, "the governments," in the words of one historian, "would be forced to take care of the details."<sup>27</sup> Their primary concern was to arouse public opposition to slavery. There would be other people who would take care of the rest of the work when antislavery sentiments became strong enough.

The abolitionists, however, did not aim at the destruction of slavery alone. They also tried to eliminate a force more defused and less tangible and yet more powerful and widespread than the institution of slavery. This was racial prejudice.<sup>28</sup> It is needless to say that racism underlay slavery. Even free Negroes, both in the South and North, were treated as an inferior race. Weld estimated in 1836 that "at least 3/5ths of the Northerners now believe the blacks are an inferior race."<sup>29</sup> Not only in the South but also in the North, they were separated from the whites and denied full equality and freedom.<sup>30</sup> The southern

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<sup>26</sup> Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York, 1967), p. 260.

<sup>27</sup> David Brion Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLIX (Sept., 1962), 227. See also Anne C. Loveland, "Evangelicalism and Immediate Emancipation in American Antislavery Thought," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXII (May, 1966), 188.

<sup>28</sup> For the development of racism in the United States, see Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas, Texas, 1963).

<sup>29</sup> Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844* (New York, 1934), I, 236.

<sup>30</sup> For discrimination against free Negroes in the North see Leon F. Litwack, *North*

historian, Ulrich B. Phillips once said that the antebellum Southerners were determined to keep the South a white man's country. It would probably also be correct to say that the antebellum Americans were determined to keep the United States a white man's country.

The abolitionists of course knew the widespread practice of racial discrimination against free Negroes and understood clearly that without rooting out this prejudice, there would be no way to end slavery and to lift the Negro to full equality with the white man. Weld told a fellow-abolitionist in 1839 that the abolitionist cause grew only as fast as racial bias died.<sup>31</sup> James G. Birney, the abolitionist exile from Kentucky and the presidential candidate of the Liberty Party in 1840, agreed: "Whilst the poor black is treated so contemptuously in what are called, the free states . . . it is not to be wondered that the cause of negro-emancipation moves so slowly."<sup>32</sup> Joshua Easton, a black abolitionist, warned the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society: "Abolitionists may attack slaveholding, but there is danger still that the spirit of slavery will survive, in the form of prejudice, after the system is overturned." He further added: "Our warfare ought not to be against slavery alone, but against the spirit which makes color a mark of degradation."<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, consistency also made it necessary for the abolitionists to battle against racial prejudice and discrimination. It would be certain that they would be charged with inconsistency and hypocrisy if the abolitionists left the debased northern free Negro alone and attacked slavery only. Gerrit Smith charged that the debasement of northern Negroes "gives the greatest efficiency to the main argument for justifying slavery." As long as northern laws, institutions and customs

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*of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961).

<sup>31</sup> Barnes and Dumond, eds., *Letters of Weld*, II, 811.

<sup>32</sup> Dwight L. Dumond, ed., *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857* (New York, 1938), I, 202.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Merton L. Dillon, *The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (Dekalb, Ill., 1974), pp. 106-107.

rendered “the freedom of the colored people but an empty name – but the debasing mockery of true freedom,” how could the abolitionists denounce racial oppression in the South?<sup>34</sup> The abolitionists therefore had to fight racial prejudice and discrimination in the North as well as slaveholding in the South.

One way to discredit racism was to prove the Negro’s capability for freedom and equality. Thus, to improve the condition of northern Negroes became an integral part and “a leading object” of the abolition movement.<sup>35</sup> The American Anti-Slavery Society expressed its conviction that “all persons of color who possess the qualifications which are demanded of others ought to be admitted forthwith to the enjoyment of the same privileges, and the exercise of the same prerogatives, as others, and that the paths of preferment, of wealth, and of intelligence should be opened as widely to them as to persons of a white complexion.”<sup>36</sup> It therefore formally adopted the betterment of the conditions of Negroes as its second aim: “The Society shall aim to elevate the character and condition of the people of color, by encouraging their intellectual, moral and religious improvement, and by removing public prejudice, that thus they may, according to their intellectual and moral worth, share an equality with the whites, of civil and religious privileges; . . .”<sup>37</sup>

To achieve this purpose, the white abolitionists argued, remonstrated and protested to persuade people of the wrongness of racial bias and discrimination. However, they did not rely on moral suasion alone in this respect. They also acted to help Negroes and intermingle with them. Generally they admitted Blacks to their antislavery organizations. The American Anti-Slavery Society even elected Negroes to its executive

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Litwack, *North of Slavery*, p. 215.

<sup>35</sup> *The Liberator*, January 1, 1831.

<sup>36</sup> “The Declaration of Sentiments” of the American Anti-Slavery Society, in Bailey, ed., *The American Spirit*, I, 364.

<sup>37</sup> “The Constitution” of the American Anti-Slavery Society, in Commager, ed., *Documents of American History*, I, 279.

committee. The abolitionists made various efforts to educate Negroes. For example, the Tappans and Prudence Crandall attempted to set up school for the Blacks, and the New England Anti-Slavery Society appointed committees charged with apprenticing black children to learn trades, ending school separation, and improving the existing schools for black children. The students of the Lane Seminary did the same thing in Cincinnati. They joined Negroes in campaigns for repeal of the discriminatory legislation in northern states. Some of them, notably Gerrit Smith, offered jobs to Negroes. As individuals, some white abolitionists did their best to help Negroes and maintained social intercourse with them. Garrison mingled freely with Negroes and often travelled with Frederick Douglass, the famous ex-slave. Lewis Tappan occasionally dined with "a few colored gentlemen."<sup>38</sup> Mrs. Lydia Child invited Negroes to a party. Weld even invited black friends to attend his wedding ceremony. There are many other examples. But those just mentioned are already enough to show that some abolitionists sincerely believed in the principle of equality of all men and were determined to put what they believed into practice.

However, not all the white abolitionists were as liberal or determined in this racial matter as Garrison or Weld or Tappan. Sensing the tremendous opposition and possible damage to the antislavery cause, many urged moderation in the matter of racial intercourse, while others refused outright to have any intercourse with the Blacks. At least one member of the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society threatened to resign if "true abolitionism" required social contact between Negroes and whites.<sup>39</sup> In fact many antislavery societies experienced heated debates on the advisability of social intercourse. Lewis Tappan even predicted that "if ever there is a split in our ranks, it will arise from collision on this point."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Barnes and Dumond, eds., *Letters of Weld*, I, 276.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Litwack, *North of Slavery*, p. 217.

<sup>40</sup> Barnes and Dumond, eds., *Letters of Weld*, I, 276-277.

The readiness of its members to yield to racial prejudice so annoyed the American Anti-Slavery Society that it specially reprimanded them that if reluctant to associate with Negroes, an abolitionist "wrongs the cause in which he is engaged."<sup>41</sup> But even these abolitionists who refused to have social intercourse with Negroes, were far more advanced than their contemporaries in the matter of racial attitude, for they agreed at least in principle that Negroes were not an inferior race and thus that racial bias was wrong. Their reluctance to have social contacts with the Blacks was largely because of social expediency.

When even they themselves were forced to retreat from the principle of racial equality, there was naturally no hope at all for the abolitionists to achieve much in pulling down the edifice of racial prejudice. It proved to be too powerful even for these daring souls.

Contrary to their failure in eliminating racial bias, the abolitionists accomplished a great deal in arousing antislavery feelings in the North, though in the beginning their antislavery agitation also met tremendous opposition. They published antislavery periodicals, wrote antislavery pamphlets and tracts and delivered antislavery speeches. They argued, rebuked, reprimanded, praised, denounced, and bullied, with the sole purpose of convincing people that human bondage was wrong and ought to be abolished immediately. At first they were received with public hostility. They were hissed, egged, stoned, dragged in the streets and even killed by mobs. Their meetings were broken up, their properties set on fire or damaged. In those early years, to be an abolitionist was indeed a very risky thing. Yet, they refused to be intimidated. They carried on their crusade unhesitatingly. Gradually, their sincerity and courage won the hearts of others and their number grew. However, the most important factor which helped the growth of abolitionism was the crusaders' success in identifying their cause with that of defending the liberties of whitemen.

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Litwack, *North of Slavery*, p. 223.

When the abolitionists began their agitation, the slaveholders and their northern allies tried to keep them down by mobs in the streets, gag rules in Congress, and interference with the post in the South. These activities obviously violated the sacred freedom of expression, the right of petition and the freedom of using the post to spread one's own opinion, guaranteed to all by the federal constitution. Pointing to these instances of violation, the abolitionists warned that a "slave power," intending to preserve and spread slavery, was determined to curb the liberties of free men.<sup>42</sup> Slavery was thus seen to be not only a system of enslaving the Negro but also a serious menace to the liberties of white men. Abolition of slavery became necessary if for nothing else but white men's self-protection. Thus, the abolitionists became not merely the champions of the slaves' freedom but the defenders of all free men's civil rights as well. In the words of one historian, the abolitionists were

fighting for the basic principle of democracy: the exaltation of the individual, recognition of his natural rights, and protection against restraints by government and his fellowmen that he might develop his talents to the utmost of his ability. In short, they were fighting to free four million men, women, and children from slavery, and a half million more from the cruel oppression of the Northern black laws and spoilation by their neighbors. They were fighting for justice and equality under the law for all men. They were fighting for the survival of law itself, for this was a contest between government by law and government by man.<sup>43</sup>

Helped by the obvious implications of the anti-abolitionist activities, the abolitionists' warning against a slave power conspiracy and their demand for immediate emancipation soon won many new converts. Even those who were indifferent to the plight of slaves or frankly racist joined the abolition movement. As a result, antislavery sentiment grew rapidly,

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<sup>42</sup> For the "slave power conspiracy," see Russell B. Nye, "Civil Liberties and the Antislavery Controversy," *Science and Society* IX (1945), 125-146; "The Slave Power Conspiracy: 1830-1860," *Science and Society*. X (1946), 262-274; and *Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy, 1830-1860* (East Lansing, Mich., 1948).

<sup>43</sup> Dumond, *Antislavery*, p. 232.



although it became mingled with an anti-southern feeling.

Just as it reached the height of its popularity, the abolition movement was split in 1840 by a dispute between the Garrisonians and non-Garrisonians over the question of proper means and ends.<sup>44</sup> After the split, Garrison and his followers continued their moral suasion and became more and more radical, while the majority of the abolitionists went into third party politics. Their political activities led finally to the appearance of the anti-expansionist Republican Party. So, after 1840, the antislavery movement was no longer dominated by moral suasion but the emergence of new political antislavery leaders trying to translate the antislavery sentiment aroused by the moral persuaders into action.

With the split of 1840, abolitionism as a moral crusade came virtually to an end. Although the American Anti-Slavery Society continued to exist until the final emancipation by President Lincoln, and although Garrison and his friends continued the moral agitation, abolition ceased to be a moral issue. Political antislavery took over. In retrospect, it may be said that the abolitionists completely failed in eliminating racial prejudice as well as in achieving equality for Negroes. Even the final emancipation was not carried out by them. However, their intensive and aggressive agitation did not leave the abolitionists without any achievement. They successfully broke up the conspiracy of silence with which slavery had been protected, shattered the Northerners' complacency with the status quo and forced them to recognize that the cruelty and injustice of slavery could not bear reexamination. By revealing the incompatibility of freedom with slavery, their crusade aroused and spread antislavery feelings in the North and thus made possible the emergence of antislavery parties.

But above all, they reaffirmed and further strengthened the fundamentals of the American ideal set by the pioneers of early years. The abolitionists were no fanatics or neurotics. They were just ordinary people, but with a deeper commit-

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<sup>44</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*.

ment to principles. In order to realize those principles, they plunged into the crusade against slavery. Their effort to defend and realize the fundamental ideas of democracy can only be considered a great contribution to the American way of life, for only firm faith in ideals can lead men to strive forever for the betterment of their conditions. This is particularly true for a society which, because of its emphasis on material success, is always in danger of submerging principles to material gains. Maybe the abolitionists were impractical, maybe they were extreme, but they were certainly true believers and brave upholders of the American ideal.

## 廢除奴隸制度運動與美國的理想

(摘要)

孫 同 勛

黑人雖在十七世紀之初即出現在北美洲，但奴隸制度直到十八世紀時始正式確立。在獨立戰爭及其後的數年中，由於革命理想的衝擊，北方與中部各州先後廢除了奴隸制度，但在南方，奴隸制度不但沒有廢除，反而隨着棉花種植的擴大，益形增長。

奴隸制度的殘暴與不合人道，自始即為若干美國人所反對，特別是教友派的信徒。但早期反對奴隸制度的力量很小，主張也極溫和，因此發生不了多大的作用。

一八三一年蓋瑞遜在波士頓開始發行解放者，隨着此一刊物的出版，反對奴隸制度的運動轉趨激烈。新一輩反對奴隸制度的人認為養奴違反了自由平等的美國理想與基督教教義，因而要求立即無條件的解放全部黑奴。他們使用道德說服的手段，透過組織會社，出版刊物與發表演講，指責奴隸制度的邪惡，攻擊種族偏見的不當，企圖煽動輿論，消滅種族偏見與迫使南方解放黑奴。在起初，他們的鼓吹引起極大的反對，但後來終於造成北方普遍的反對奴隸制度的情緒，而為以反對奴隸制度為宗旨的新政黨出現鋪路。他們在消滅種族偏見方面雖完全失敗，但却為後來林肯總統的解放奴隸造成必要的輿論支持。尤其重新肯定與加強了美國的立國理想——尊重個人的價值與尊嚴及其享受自由、平等、追求幸福的權利。