

A Call for Help in the Fight  
Against Slavery

Rey Banzaert

11/25/2023

Ever since Europeans immigrated to what is now the United States, slavery was a fundamental part of the economy. However, many people were opposed to this, and in the early 1800's, started forming abolitionist groups, with the target of opposing slavery, as well as expanding into other areas. These groups fought slavery in many ways, from protests to the media. *The Liberator* was one of these forms of fighting. Made by William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator* was a collection of articles targeting specifically the abolition of slavery. This all led to the Civil War, a 4 year fight to liberate slaves. However, many believe that the abolitionist groups were fully inclusive, while in reality, it was quite the opposite. Despite that, one group was different. In the first issue of *The Liberator*, the article "To the public" By William Lloyd Garrison was a request for help from people of all identities in the fight against slavery, which differs from many other abolitionists. We can see this in the fact that *The Liberator* was an article specifically targeted towards the immediate abolition of slavery, and that most abolitionists solely tried to include people from certain areas, whereas *The Liberator* was calling to everyone.

One of the most ironic parts about the abolitionist movement was that abolitionists themselves were segregated. Some movements would exclude people based on gender, religion, and even race. As David Blight says, "But for black abolitionists, it became very often simply a case of the demand for recognition, the demand for mutual respect. And it was also especially frustrating to black abolitionists to deal sometimes with the kinds of abstract debates that abolitionists would have, that white abolitionists would have, over doctrine. And, increasingly, in the 1850s, black abolitionists didn't have time to struggle over doctrinaire questions of tactics and strategy. They were by the 1850s about the business of building their own communities, and trying to organize real strategies against slavery in the South. Many white abolitionists had certain expectations of what black abolitionists were to provide or to perform within this movement. Very often, black abolitionists had different, very different, perceptions of what their role ought to be. So, there was a struggle among white and black abolitionists about just what the proper role of a black abolitionist was in this movement." Here he is stating how there were two main groups: black abolitionists and white abolitionists. For the black abolitionists, all they wanted in the white groups was "demand for recognition" and the "demand for

mutual respect". However, sometimes this wouldn't be given, even though they were fighting for the same cause. Additionally, David is stating that later in the 1850's black abolitionists "didn't have time" to struggle with racism. So they started building their own communities, and actually started to make strategies against slavery in the south. Along with that, white abolitionists had ideas on what the black abolitionists wanted, but sometimes their views were very different. All of this created an internal struggle inside the abolitionist movement.

One of the main differences between the abolitionists was the fight for gradual vs immediate abolition of slavery. More commonly, people pushed gradual abolition, trying to appeal to the slave owners. However, more so the black abolitionists fought for the immediate. "To appease slave owners, the act gradually emancipated enslaved people without making slavery immediately illegal. The act permitted Pennsylvania slaveholders to keep the enslaved individuals they already owned unless they failed to register them annually. At the same time, the act provided for the eventual freedom of individuals who were newly born into slavery." This law would have allowed for slave owners to keep the slaves, unless they failed to register them annually. It would have created a system where people who were already enslaved could have continued to be slaves for the rest of their lives, so long as the enslaver remembered to register them. Additionally, it made it so that people who were born slaves would be freed eventually, following the same rules. This, although allowing freedom, had the problem of, if the slave owner remembered, the slaves would never be free.

The first article of *The Liberator*, "To the Public", was a call for the immediate end of slavery. In the article, William Lloyd Garrison states that "I am aware, that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? 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. I am in earnest-I will not equivocate-I will not excuse -I will not retreat a single inch-AND I WILL BE HEARD." Where he says "I am aware, that many may object to the severity of my language...", William Lloyd Garrison is talking about what

was previously mentioned; the gradual vs. immediate abolition of slavery. However, he goes on to say that “...is there not cause for severity? 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.” Here he reframes his own personal beliefs, where he is trying to be as harsh and truthful as possible. Because of that, he will not use moderation. He adds on by saying “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. I am in earnest-I will not equivocate-I will not excuse -I will not retreat a single inch-AND I WILL BE HEARD.” William Lloyd Garrison compares the urgency of abolition of slavery as urgent as a man whose house is on fire, or as if his wife was dying, or telling the mother of her baby to calmly take the baby out of the fire. In those scenarios, no one would use moderation. So why should we here? *The Liberator*, although seeming similar to other abolitionist news or groups, had a major difference in its beliefs, resulting in more people joining the fight.

At this time, most abolitionist groups and newspapers chose to exclude certain groups from participating. In the 1830's, lots of abolitionists groups, although they were fighting for equal rights, did not include certain people. Oftentimes people of certain races, ethnicities, religions, gender identities, and more were left out. “In defending the great cause of human rights, I wish to derive the assistance of all religions and of all parties. Assenting to the ‘self-evident truth’ maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, ‘that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights--among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’, I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population.” Where he says “Assenting to the ‘self-evident truth’ maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, ‘that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights--among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness’, I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population.”, he is directly quoting the Declaration of Independence, using the lines “all men are created equal” and “[all men are] endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights--among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” to show how the

Declaration itself is a document supporting all peoples, using that to back up the previously stated phrase: “In defending the great cause of human rights, I wish to derive the assistance of all religions and of all parties.” Here, William Lloyd Garrison is stating that, for the cause of defending human rights, he wants help from everyone. Even though he was an anti-semiter, he still realizes how big a fight this is, and how he needs the help of everyone he can get, regardless of his personal beliefs.

Overall, most abolitionist groups had sour undertones, and excluded some groups. However, while writing *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison understood that this fight was above his own personal beliefs, and requested the help of everyone. Most tellings of the leadup to and the Civil War display abolitionists as a very liberal group, “fighting for what’s right”. But as we have seen, that is not always the case. It is important for us to realize that causes we believe in and fight for, although being good, can still cause harm to others around us. Using that realization, we can look back at other parts of history, and see other examples of fighting for causes we believe in causing harm, or look at people fighting for causes we don’t believe in, and seeing both the harm and good that came out of them.

*The Liberator*. Boston, Mass.: William Lloyd Garrison and Isaac Knapp, January 1, 1831. 17 Nov 2023. <<https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/mc87rk08p>>.

“David Blight on Racism in the Abolitionist Movement.” *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4i2978.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4i2978.html). Accessed 20 Nov. 2023.

“William Lloyd Garrison.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 14 Nov. 2023, [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Lloyd\\_Garrison](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Lloyd_Garrison).