



Ambassadors of Abolition

BACKGROUND

The Boston area was home to a diverse group of abolitionists. These “ambassadors of abolition” included people from various racial and class backgrounds, from idealistic young people to seasoned political veterans. Together, whites descended from the Puritans; successful, middle-class, free people of color; and working class people of both races shared a common goal of eradicating slavery. These dedicated individuals collaborated on memorable public events that enriched America’s 19th-century culture and helped inform the American people about the movement to end human bondage.

Through creative and courageous acts, some men and women who had been enslaved in the South achieved self-emancipation. Narratives written by self-emancipated and free people of color aided in educating Americans about the evils of slavery, helped raise funds to support resistance efforts, and fueled the opportunities to travel and lecture throughout the Northeast and Europe.

Names and Places To Know

- Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society
- John Brown
- Maria Weston Chapman
- Frederick Douglass
- Charlotte Forten
- Helen E. Garrison
- William Lloyd Garrison
- Winslow Homer
- William Cooper Nell
- New England Anti-Slavery Society
- Susan Paul
- The Tremont Temple

Advertisement in *The Liberator*, September 7, 1855

5000 Copies Sold in Two Days,
Of
MY BONDAGE AND MY FREEDOM,
BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS
One Vo., 12 mo., 464 pp., Illustrated. Price, \$1.25

WHY SO POPULAR?

It is the Work of an American Slave,
Therefore excites American Sympathy!
Every line and letter are his own,
And it is a Volume of Truth and Power!
It tells the earnest, startling truth,
Without ranting or madness!
It addresses the intellect and the heart!
Every free Press chants its praise,
Every free Voter will read it,
And every Bookseller supply it.

MILLER, ORTON & MULLIGAN,
Publishers,
25 Park Row, New York,
and 107 Genesee st. Auburn

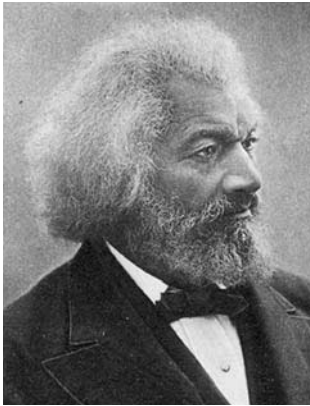
Advertisement from *The Liberator* for Frederick Douglass's autobiography, 1855 [ENLARGE]

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Self-emancipated Frederick Douglass became one of the most articulate and influential abolitionists in America and abroad. Garrison later recalled his reaction when he first heard Douglass tell his story: “I never hated slavery so intensely as at that moment.” After publishing his autobiography in 1845, Douglass was threatened with recapture. His book sold 30,000 copies within five years in the United States and England—an incredible achievement. After moving to Rochester, New York, he lamented the loss of his Massachusetts colleagues, who were well organized, articulate, and stimulating in their arguments against slavery.

In Focus

1. What was the purpose of this document? Who placed the ad? Who was its audience?
2. What details of Frederick Douglass’s life story can you learn from this ad? What is significant about the fact that “Every line and letter are his own”?
3. Why might “every free voter” be interested in reading Douglass’s book?
4. Even by today’s standards, selling 5,000 copies of a book in two days is impressive—but it was particularly notable without the kind of media and technology that we now take for granted. Why do you think this book was so popular? What impact do you think the sales of his books had on Douglass’s economic status? Does it surprise you to learn that Douglass was able to earn a living and to support himself as a writer? Discuss.



Frederick Douglass
[ENLARGE]

Activities and Investigations

1. What do you really know about Frederick Douglass? Were you aware, for example, that he was a strong supporter of women's rights or that he served as U.S. ambassador to Haiti and as an adviser to President Lincoln? Working in small groups, find out more about Douglass's life and work. Have each group focus on one aspect of Douglass's biography. Together, present your combined biography.
2. Locate a copy of *My Bondage and My Freedom* or download the text from www.gutenberg.org/etext/202. Read it and write a review. Do you find it an effective recruiting tool for abolitionists? Why do you think the book was so popular? Could this book be as popular today as it was when it was first published? Why or why not?
3. Many other "slave" narratives and accounts of African American abolitionists have been published since 1767. Read and report on the narrative written by Harriet Jacobs, Solomon Northup, Olaudah Equiano, or another enslaved person. You can also choose a lesser-known abolitionist to research, and then share his or her biography with the class. These include abolitionists such as Maria Stewart, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, or Henry Highland Garnet.

Women in the Abolitionist Movement

Women were active in abolitionist organizations and formed their own societies. They held meetings for their members as well as a variety of public events, such as lectures, fairs, and conferences that often brought many antislavery supporters from nearby towns and faraway cities. In 1832, the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society, organized initially by a group of African American women, was one of the many female societies that became highly effective fundraisers and ardent supporters of the cause. Societies also produced printed documents, records of society meetings, books, and pamphlets that informed others about their mission and raised money for the abolitionist cause.

CHARLOTTE FORTEN

Charlotte Forten was a member of a prominent African American manufacturing and abolitionist family of Philadelphia. She was sent to Salem, Massachusetts, to live with a leading black abolitionist family, the Remonds, who ran a respected catering business. After completing her studies at Salem State Normal School—a teacher's college where she was the first African American student—Forten served briefly as Salem's first African American public school teacher. She kept a diary and, in this excerpt, recorded her reactions to William Lloyd Garrison and Helen E. Garrison's weekend visit to the Remond family home in Salem.

In Focus

1. What factual information about William Lloyd and Helen E. Garrison can you find in this entry? What opinions does Forten express?
2. Why was February 3, 1856, "one of the happiest days" in Charlotte Forten's life? What do these diary entries tell you about the personal relationship between William Lloyd Garrison and members of the African American community?

From Charlotte Forten's Diary

Saturday, February 2, 1856

This evening our beloved Mr. Garrison and his wife arrived. —Most gladly did we welcome them. The Remonds and Putnams spent the evening with us, and we had a delightful time. Mr. Garrison was very genial as he always is, and sang delightfully.

Sunday, February 3, 1856

This has been one of the happiest days of my life. More and more do I love and admire that great and good man. His wife is a lovely woman; it is indeed delightful to see so happy and noble a couple. This evening Mr. Garrison gave us one of the best lectures I ever heard him deliver....

Monday, February 4, 1856

This morning Mr. and Mrs. G. left. This was the first time they have staid with us since I have been here. And the pleasure, the great pleasure which I experienced from this visit, will prevent me from soon forgetting it.

**Excerpt from the diary
of Charlotte Forten, 1856**

[ENLARGE]

WORDS OF THUNDER Teacher's Guide



Charlotte Forten
[ENLARGE]

3. Study this photo of Charlotte Forten. What is significant about her decision to pose with a book? What does this indicate about her? What details in the photograph reveal that this is a historical image?

Activities and Investigations

1. In what ways did Charlotte Forten and members of her family contribute to the abolition movement? Learn more about her and her family at www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part33p477.html. Then write a paragraph in which you describe the various roles the Forten family played in the abolition movement.
2. In Charlotte Forten's later years, she became a strong supporter of voting rights for women. Imagine that the year is 1910 and that Forten is writing a diary entry in which she argues that women should be allowed to vote. What connections might she make between her work as an abolitionist and her commitment to women's suffrage?
3. Using the documents in this section as a starting point, what can you conclude about the role that women played in the abolition movement? As part of your answer, investigate the contributions to the movement made by Maria Stewart, who is thought to be the first American woman to speak in public about politics to both men and women.



Maria Weston Chapman
[ENLARGE]

MARIA WESTON CHAPMAN

Maria Weston Chapman, an affluent Bostonian, was a founding member of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS). She edited *The Liberty Bell*, an annual publication that contained writings of prominent literary women and men and public figures such as Lydia Maria Child, Frederick Douglass, and William Lloyd Garrison. She was also the organizing force behind the BFASS's annual fairs. Under her supervision, members made and acquired items for sale and encouraged their neighbors to attend.

In Focus

1. Examine the photograph of Maria Weston Chapman. What information can you learn from it? (You may want to write down your ideas so that you can later verify them.)
2. In 1835 an angry mob converged on a meeting of the BFASS. Urged by the mayor to leave, Maria said, "If this is the last bulwark of freedom, we may as well die here as anywhere." What leadership qualities does this statement indicate?
3. What special challenges do you think female abolitionists faced?

Activities and Investigations

1. If this portrait of Maria Weston Chapman came to life, what might it say about slavery and the abolition movement? Write the text of a soliloquy in which the painting shares its thoughts and ideas. (You may want to conduct further research on Chapman's life and work before you start to write.)
2. In 1839, Chapman and two other women were elected to the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The Society's president objected strongly, stating that "to put a woman on the committee with men is contrary to the usages of civilized society." Using Chapman's case as a starting point, find out more about the debate over the role of women in the abolition movement. What arguments were made to include and exclude women from leadership roles? Was a distinction made between white women and women of color?



"The Captive" Handkerchief
[ENLARGE]

"THE CAPTIVE" HANDKERCHIEF

This delicate silk handkerchief was created specifically for the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society for sale at its annual fairs. The handkerchief has three columns in which text and music for a freedom song have been printed.

In Focus

1. Read aloud the lyrics of the song printed on the handkerchief. What emotions are these lyrics attempting to awaken in listeners? Point to specific words that help create these emotions.
2. What items today, like the handkerchief, are used to convey political or social messages? Brainstorm with your class. Can you find T-shirts, caps, bracelets, stickers, or ribbons in your school or community that represent certain causes?

Activities and Investigations

Find examples—in magazines, newspapers, television, billboards, and on the Web—of various formats that convey political or social messages, from bumper stickers to buttons to advertising campaigns to slogans to spokespeople. Examples include political campaigns, public service announcements, breast cancer awareness, and “stop smoking” campaigns. Choose one cause and an example of its most effective communication. Present it to the class and explain why you think it’s effective. How has it affected your understanding of the issue?

Children and the Abolition Movement

Young people participated actively in the abolition struggle. For example, children as young as 4 years old took part in a choir that sang protest songs at various abolitionist events. *The Liberator*—which contained children’s stories—was read regularly to students at the Abiel Smith School and was a source of inspiration to young people throughout Boston’s African American community.

GARRISON MEDAL

The Juvenile Garrison Independent Society, a group of young people who were committed to supporting the abolition movement, presented this heart-shaped silver medal to William Lloyd Garrison on the eve of his first trip to England in 1833. The nearly worn-away inscription on the back of this medal reads: “To William Lloyd Garrison, Esquire. The fearless, faithful and eloquent vindicator of the rights of the people of Color.”



Juvenile Garrison Independent Society Medal, 1833 [ENLARGE]

In Focus

1. Discuss the inscription. What message were the young people who gave this medal to Garrison sending through their choice of words?
2. What does the inscription tell you about the young people’s opinion of Garrison?

Activities and Investigations

1. One active member of the Juvenile Garrison Independent Society was William Cooper Nell, an African American activist from Boston. What role did Nell play in fighting for integrated schools in Boston? Visit www.nps.gov/boaf/williamcoopernell.htm to find out.

- Working with a small group, brainstorm and come up with a list of men and women in contemporary society whom you admire and respect. Your list could include people from the world of politics, education, business, the arts, or sports, as well as members of your community or family. Now have each member of your group choose one name from your list and imagine that you will be giving this person a medal with an inscription on it, similar to the one that young people gave to Garrison in 1833. What would you say in your inscription that captures the essence of this person's contributions in 25 words or less?

The following letter by Susan Paul about a Juvenile Choir appearance was printed in *The Liberator* in 1834.

Dear Mr. Garrison, The last "Liberator" contained your lengthy account of the recent New England Anti-Slavery Association meeting in Salem, Massachusetts. As you noted, the stirring occasion included the appearance of the juvenile choir of Boston, a choir made up of students from the city's segregated public school Number 6. On this, our third public performance, the choir sang several abolitionist hymns for the vast concourse of spectators and the overflowing house at the Second Baptist Church. We were encouraged by the repeated bursts of applause from the assembled masses that suggested their deep gratification.

Your report on this momentous antislavery meeting, ... also included direct remarks about the uncivil treatment that [the choir and I] received from the drivers of the coaches provided to carry us to Salem. "... as soon as the drivers discovered that the children were somewhat darker in complexion than themselves, they got into a rage, and profanely declared that ... they (would not) carry a load of [Negroes] in the best coaches of Boston...."

Excerpt from Susan Paul's Letter to William Lloyd Garrison, 1834 [\[ENLARGE\]](#)

SUSAN PAUL'S LETTER

Susan Paul was a teacher at one of Boston's segregated primary schools and a talented choir leader and writer. The daughter of the Reverend Thomas Paul, she was a dedicated abolitionist and one of only three female members of the New England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS). Her Juvenile Choir sang regularly at NEASS meetings. This letter by Susan Paul about a Juvenile Choir appearance was printed in *The Liberator* in 1834.

In Focus

- What does this letter reveal about the composition of the Juvenile Choir?
- Why did some drivers refuse to carry members of the choir in their coaches? According to Paul, was this treatment unusual? Cite a sentence in the letter to support your answer.
- What does Paul mean when she refers to an "unholy prejudice"? How does she suggest that this prejudice be opposed?

Activities and Investigations

- What prefix and root word combine to form the word *prejudice*? Develop a definition for this word. (You may consult a dictionary.) Then write about a situation that involved prejudice. This could be an example of prejudice that you witnessed or experienced, or an example from history or literature. What role did prejudice play in this case? What was irrational about the judgments that people made?
- Imagine a conversation that could have taken place in the 1830s between Susan Paul and William Lloyd Garrison in which they discuss conditions for African Americans in Boston and strategies for abolishing slavery. Working with a partner, write the text of the conversation. Then stage your dialogue for the class.