

## AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN US HISTORY AND SOCIETY

### The Abolition Movement

The reform movements and sectional conflicts of the mid 1800's centered on the issue of slavery. There arose a movement in the North called the **Abolitionist Movement**. The movement to abolish slavery represented the very best of human intentions yet was a strike to the heart of Southerners. Southerners, as a result, resisted abolition. This led to increasingly sectional conflict.

Some famous abolitionists:

**1. William Lloyd Garrison** - Publisher of the newspaper *The Liberator*, he was the most outspoken and most vocal of all abolitionists. He often wrote in blunt language that left no room to be misunderstood. This short excerpt shows his resolve and his passion: "*I am in earnest. I will not equivocate; I will not excuse; I will not retreat a single inch; and I will be heard!*"

**2. Frederick Douglass** - Frederick Douglass, (1818?-1895) was the leading spokesman of African Americans in the 1800's. Born a slave, Douglass became a noted reformer, author, and orator. He devoted his life to the abolition of slavery and the fight for black rights.

**3. Harriet Tubman** - Harriet Tubman was an African American whose daring rescues helped hundreds of slaves escape to freedom. She became the most famous leader of the Underground Railroad, which aided slaves fleeing to the Free states or to Canada. Blacks called her Moses, after the Biblical figure who led the Hebrews from Egypt.

**4. Sojourner Truth** - Like Harriet Tubman, Truth was born into slavery (with the given name Isabella) and had no formal education. She fled the last of a series of masters in 1827, and several years later, in response to what she described as a command from God, she became an itinerant preacher and took the name Sojourner Truth. Among her most memorable appearances was at an 1851 women's rights conference in Akron, Ohio: in her famous "Ain't I a woman?" speech she forcefully attacked the hypocrisies of organized religion, white privilege, and everything in between.

**5. Nat Turner** - Nat Turner, a black slave and preacher, led the most famous slave revolt in United States history. In 1831, Turner and from 60 to 70 other slaves killed about 60 whites in Virginia. The victims included the family of Joseph Travis, Turner's owner.

More whites died during the rebellion led by Turner than in any other in the nation's history. The Virginia militia captured and hanged about 20 of the slaves, including Turner. In addition, angry whites killed about 100 innocent slaves. The rebellion caused the Southern States to pass strict laws for the control of slaves, especially those who were preachers.

**6. John Brown** - He lived and worked successively in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and New York. Meanwhile, he had conceived an intense hatred of the institution of slavery and had resolved to do everything in his power to bring about its destruction. Brown, with only eighteen men, five of whom were Negroes, attacked and captured the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, W. Va. on October 16, 1859. On October 18 he was overpowered by a small force of United States Marines under the command of Col. Robert E. Lee. Brown was captured, seriously wounded and thrown into prison. He was tried and convicted for "treason and conspiring and advising with slaves and other rebels and murder in the first degree" On December 2, 1859, Brown was hanged at Charleston.

**7. Harriet Becher Stowe** – She wrote a book describing the cruel condition of slaves. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* addresses the issue of slavery. The novel is extremely effective in conveying the inhumanity concerning slavery and does so in an honest manner. The preposterousness of such practice is clearly identified by the reader and illustrated remarkably well by Stowe. Stowe also discerningly demonstrates the disheartening fact that, "slavery always ends in misery" Stowe's book was sold over 300,000 copies in one year, a record for the time. In fact more copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were sold that year than copies of the Bible!