

CO#2: How did the spiritual reawakening of the 1st half of the 1800s manifest itself in a variety of reform movements?

Instructions: Read "Opening Editorial of *The Liberator*". Highlight text as appropriate. Make marginal notations of passages that are relevant to the following prompts. Provide thoughtful written responses to the following prompts.

- (1) How did Garrison's approach, tactics, and goals of abolitionism differ from traditional abolitionist efforts?
- (2) Why does Garrison believe that the North is more in need of a "revolution in public sentiment" regarding slavery than the south?
- (3) What is Garrison's perspective on gradual abolition?
- (4) How is Garrison's language "severe?" How does Garrison justify the "severity" of his language?
- (5) What objections does Garrison draw from his critics? How does he respond to these objections?

73. Opening Editorial of *The Liberator* (1831)

Source: *The Liberator*, January 1, 1831.

The appearance on January 1, 1831, of William Lloyd Garrison's weekly newspaper, *The Liberator*, marked a turning point in the crusade against slavery. Garrison became the most prominent spokesman for a new generation of reformers who rejected the traditional approach of gradual emancipation and demanded immediate abolition. Also unlike their predecessors, they directed explosive language against slavery and slaveholders and insisted that blacks, once free, should be incorporated as equal citizens of the republic rather than being deported.

Garrison was among the first to appreciate the key role of public opinion in a mass democracy. He focused his efforts not on infiltrating the existing

political parties (he opposed voting, since the Constitution protected slavery) but on awakening the nation to the moral evil of slavery. Persuaded that northern sentiment about slavery was as much of an obstacle to abolition as southern, Garrison used deliberately provocative language, calculated to seize public attention. "I will be as harsh as truth," Garrison announced, "and as uncompromising as justice."

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DURING MY RECENT TOUR for the purpose of exciting the minds of the people by a series of discourses on the subject of slavery, every place that I visited gave fresh evidence of the fact, that a greater revolution in public sentiment was to be effected in the free states—and particularly in *New-England*—than at the south. I found contempt more bitter, opposition more active, detraction more relentless, prejudice more stubborn, and apathy more frozen, than among slave owners themselves. Of course, there were individual exceptions to the contrary. This state of things afflicted, but did not dishearten me. I determined, at every hazard, to lift up the standard of emancipation in the eyes of the nation, *within sight of Bunker Hill and in the birth place of liberty*. That standard is now unfurled; and long may it float, unhurt by the spoliations of time or the missiles of a desperate foe—yea, till every chain be broken, and every bondman set free! Let southern oppressors tremble—let their secret abettors tremble—let their northern apologist tremble—let all the enemies of the persecuted blacks tremble.

I deem the publication of my original Prospectus unnecessary, as it has obtained a wide circulation. The principles therein inculcated will be steadily pursued in this paper, excepting that I shall not array myself as the political partisan of any man. 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. In Park-street Church, on the Fourth of July, 1829, in an address on slavery, I unreflectingly assented to the popular but pernicious doctrine of *gradual* abolition. I seize this opportunity to make a full and unequivocal recantation, and thus publicly to ask pardon of my God, of my country, and of my brethren the poor slaves, for having uttered a sentiment so full of timidity, injustice and absurdity. A similar recantation, from my pen, was published in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* at Baltimore, in September, 1829. My conscience is now satisfied.

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. The apathy of the people is enough to make every statue leap from its pedestal, and to hasten the resurrection of the dead.

It is pretended, that I am retarding the cause of emancipation by the coarseness of my invective, and the precipitancy of my measures. *The charge is not true.* On this question my influence,—humble as it is,—is felt at this moment to a considerable extent, and shall be felt in coming years—not perniciously, but beneficially—not as a curse, but as a blessing; and posterity will bear testimony that I was right. I desire to thank God, that he enables me to disregard "the fear of man which bringeth a snare," and to speak his truth in its simplicity and power. And here I close with this fresh dedication:

Oppression! I have seen thee, face to face,
 And met thy cruel eye and cloudy brow;
 But thy soul-withering glance I fear not now—
 For dread to prouder feelings doth give place
 Of deep abhorrence! Scorning the disgrace
 Of slavish knees that at thy footstool bow,
 I also kneel—but with far other vow
 Do hail thee and thy hord of hirelings base:—
 I swear, while life-blood warms my throbbing veins,
 Still to oppose and thwart, with heart and hand,
 Thy brutalising sway—till Afric's chains
 Are burst, and Freedom rules the rescued land,—
 Trampling Oppression and his iron rod:
Such is the vow I take—SO HELP ME GOD!