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*Everyday Life:*

# REFORM IN AMERICA

WITH CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN EACH CHAPTER

WALTER A. HAZEN

GOOD YEAR BOOKS

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### Dedication

To Martha, Jordan, and Allison

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## Introduction

**I**mmigrants preparing to leave for America in the 19th and early 20th centuries would have scoffed at the word *reform* mentioned in the same breath with the Land of Their Dreams. Reform? What was there to reform about America? America was the Garden of Eden! Its streets were paved with gold and its people went about in fancy carriages with money falling out of their pockets!

Or so the thinking went. As things turned out, America was crying out for reform. It was, to be sure, the most democratic nation in the world. But underneath the glitter were social, economic, and political ills that separated Americans into “Haves” and “Have Nots.” The “Haves” enjoyed cushy jobs, comfortable homes, and political privileges. The “Have Nots,” although not so severely persecuted as many had been in their native lands, were nonetheless relegated to the status of second-class citizens. And the millions of black people who either slaved or worked on these shores were in even worse straits.

What was so wrong with America in the 19th and 20th centuries that spurred dedicated reformers to action? The ills were many. Millions of blacks, as stated above, were subjected to the evils of slavery with little hope of freedom. Women could neither vote nor enter fields of work monopolized by men. Prisons and mental institutions were places of horror that often treated inmates like wild animals. Families and society were torn apart by alcohol abuse. Young children worked long hours in factories and mines. Adult workers labored for a pittance and had no way to address their grievances. Free blacks and immigrants lived in run-down slum areas with little chance to improve their lots.

In *Everyday Life: Reform in America*, you will learn how most of what was undemocratic and unfair about America has been slowly corrected. Much remains to be done, of course, but our country has come a long way in the last two centuries.

Walter A. Hazen





## The Antislavery Movement

**T**he antislavery movement in America dates back to colonial times. In 1688, the Quakers of Germantown, Pennsylvania, were the first to publicly denounce the holding of slaves. Twelve years later, in 1700, a Massachusetts judge named Samuel Sewall wrote a paper condemning the existence of slavery in America. This was followed in 1775 by the founding in Philadelphia of the first antislavery society in the American colonies. The society was established by Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Benjamin Rush who gave it the unlikely name of the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage. (Try saying that fast without swallowing your tongue!)

Thus, long before the word *abolitionist* (one who favored doing away with slavery) came into use in the early 1800s, there was a drive on to abolish the institution in the colonies. By the end of the 18th century, most of the Northern states had done just that. Rhode Island was the first in 1774. Vermont followed suit in 1777 and Pennsylvania in 1780. Then came Massachusetts in 1783, Connecticut and Rhode Island in 1784, and New York in 1799.

In 1787 Congress passed an ordinance (law) forbidding slavery in the Northwest Territory. This was a large region that extended from what is now Ohio to Wisconsin. The Ordinance of 1787 assured that slavery was doomed forever in the North.

Had it not been for the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 by Eli Whitney, slavery might also have gradually disappeared in the South. Virginia actually freed some 10,000 slaves in the years following the

Revolutionary War, and other states were considering doing the same. But Whitney's gin made the growing of cotton profitable and called for an increase in the number of slaves to work on the cotton plantations. Strange as it may seem, an invention by a northerner helped strengthen slavery in the South.

Before the abolitionist movement began, there was an effort to return free blacks and freed slaves to Africa. Paul Cuffee, a free black man who had grown wealthy in the shipbuilding industry, was one of the first to propose such an idea. In 1812, he actually resettled

An early model of Eli Whitney's cotton gin. The cotton gin revolutionized cotton growing and strengthened the institution of slavery.





38 blacks in the British colony of Sierra Leone in West Africa. This number is really small when one considers that there were over 40,000 free blacks in America at the time.

Five years after Cuffee's endeavor, the American Colonization Society was founded. Its sole purpose was to encourage free blacks to resettle in Africa. John C. Calhoun of South Carolina and Henry Clay of Kentucky were among its organizers. They reasoned that black people would be interested in relocating to escape the prejudice and discrimination they faced in America. They even purchased a large tract of land in west Africa to that end. (This land later became the nation of Liberia.)

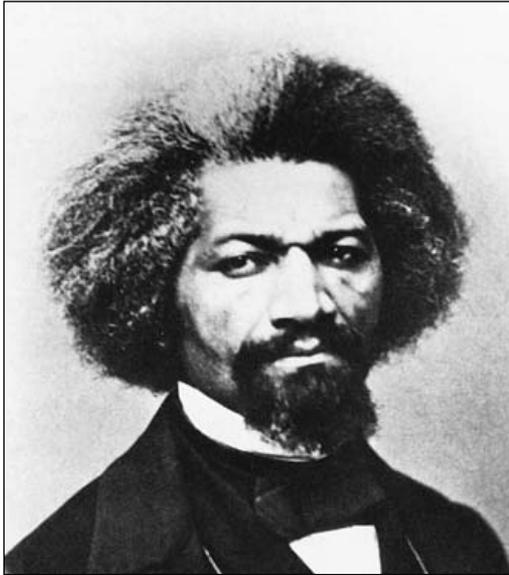
In response to the American Colonization Society's call for free blacks to resettle in Africa, a group of 3,000 prominent blacks met in Philadelphia in 1817. They were led by James Forten, a wealthy sailmaker who had fought in the Continental navy as a youth. Forten and others discouraged free blacks from accepting the American Colonization Society's offer. As a result, the Society's plans were not very successful. Only about 15,000 blacks emigrated to Africa between 1822 and the outbreak of the Civil War. Blacks refused to go for several reasons. Most, in spite of the prejudice and hardships they faced, considered America their home. Others had no desire to relocate to what they saw as the "wilds of Africa."

Free blacks and antislavery whites joined forces in the 1830s to launch the abolitionist movement. Prominent among white abolitionist leaders were Theodore Weld, Lucretia Mott, and William Lloyd Garrison. Theodore Weld was a Massachusetts reformer who dedicated his life to abolition. Lucretia Mott was a Quaker who fought for women's suffrage just as hard as she fought to end slavery. In 1833, she helped found the Female Antislavery Society in Philadelphia.

William Lloyd Garrison was a Boston newspaper publisher who once burned a copy of the Constitution because it recognized slavery. In 1831, he started his own antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*. In his weekly editions, Garrison called for an immediate end to slavery. He scoffed at the ideas of moderate abolitionists, who believed in gradual abolition and paying slaveowners for their losses. He even called for the North to secede from the Union. In 1833, he helped found the American Antislavery Society.

William Lloyd Garrison, one of the more extreme of the Northern abolitionists. His antislavery newspaper was often met with hostility in both the North and South.





Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, whose speeches and writings aroused Americans to the plight of slaves in the South.

The leading black abolitionist of the day was Frederick Douglass. Douglass was the son of a white Maryland slaveowner and a slave woman. As a youngster, he worked for a while as a house servant and was taught to read and write. In 1838, when he was 21, he escaped and went to Massachusetts. There he gained attention by making speeches against slavery. To avoid being captured and sent back to Maryland, he went to England for several years. He earned enough money lecturing in England and Ireland to return to the United States in 1847 and buy his freedom.

Douglass started his own antislavery newspaper, the *North Star*. He edited the paper until the outbreak of the Civil War, when he organized two regiments of black soldiers to fight for the North. Douglass was

joined in his antislavery efforts by such prominent black abolitionists as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman. Sojourner Truth, like Lucretia Mott, also became very active in the women's suffrage movement. Harriet Tubman was one of the main "conductors" on the Underground Railroad. Her heroics will be discussed later.

Abolitionists were supported by some of the leading writers of the day. Black writers Frances Harper and Joshua McCarter Simpson joined in the attack on slavery. So did such white authors as Ralph Waldo Emerson and John Greenleaf Whittier. Others of note were Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and James Russell Lowell. Thoreau even went to prison briefly for refusing to pay a tax he said went to support slavery.

To help escaped slaves flee to the North and to Canada, abolitionists organized the Underground Railroad. Don't be confused by the name; the Underground Railroad was no railroad at all, and it certainly was not underground. One story holds that the name came about when a group of slave catchers from Kentucky were chasing a runaway slave named Tice Davids. They followed Davids' trail to the Ohio River and watched him closely as he swam to the other side to freedom in Ohio. They saw him emerge from the river and then disappear completely. One of the slave catchers remarked that "he must have gone on an underground road."

The Underground Railroad was a series of routes and hideaways that enabled escaped slaves to reach freedom in the north. Levi Coffin, a white





Quaker, was the “president” of the railroad and directed its operations from Cincinnati. Both black and white abolitionists “worked” for the railroad, risking their lives daily to help slaves escape from a life of bondage.

The Underground Railroad had its own special terminology. Escaped fugitives were either passengers, freight, or merchandise. Guides who led them to freedom were conductors. Hiding places along the way were stations or depots. The person in charge of a station was the stationmaster. Escape itself was referred to as catching the next train.

Slaves being led along the Underground Railroad traveled at night. Often they were concealed in farm wagons under loads of produce. During the day, they hid in barns and homes that served as stations. Stationmasters provided them with food and other supplies they needed to continue their journey.

The most famous conductor on the Underground Railroad was Harriet Tubman. She was an escaped slave from Maryland who returned 19 times and guided more than 300 slaves along the road to freedom. On one trip she led her aged parents to safety in Auburn, New York. She and other “conductors” displayed great courage in light of the Fugitive Slave Law passed by Congress in 1850. This law required northerners to return escaped slaves to their owners and provided punishment for those who did not.

The Underground Railroad stayed in operation until the outbreak of the Civil War. During its short existence, it was responsible for about 75,000 slaves escaping to freedom. With the announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation abolishing slavery in 1863, “employees” of the railroad could look back with pride to their accomplishments.

As a postscript (addition) to the story of abolition, it should be pointed out that not every escaped slave chose to travel along the Underground Railroad. Others devised means of their own. Perhaps the most ingenious was Henry “Box” Brown of Richmond, Virginia. Brown had friends nail him inside a wooden box marked THIS SIDE UP and ship him to antislavery sympathizers in Philadelphia. How’s that for creativity?



Harriet Tubman (far left) with a group of freed slaves. Ms. Tubman risked her life to lead more than 300 slaves to freedom in the North.





Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Name That Abolitionist

Many people were involved in the abolitionist movement. Thirteen of these are listed in the word box to the right. Select the correct name from the box and write it on the blank line in front of each statement.

**Henry Brown**

**John C. Calhoun**

**Levi Coffin**

**Paul Cuffee**

**Frederick Douglass**

**Benjamin Franklin**

**William Lloyd Garrison**

**Lucretia Mott**

**Samuel Sewall**

**Henry David Thoreau**

**Sojourner Truth**

**Harriet Tubman**

**Eli Whitney**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ "I invented the cotton gin."
2. \_\_\_\_\_ "I was a conductor on the Underground Railroad."
3. \_\_\_\_\_ "I lectured in England and Ireland and saved enough money to buy my freedom."
4. \_\_\_\_\_ "I was known as 'Box' because of the way I escaped to Philadelphia."
5. \_\_\_\_\_ "I was a Massachusetts judge who condemned slavery as early as 1700."
6. \_\_\_\_\_ "I helped found the Female Antislavery Society."
7. \_\_\_\_\_ "I was imprisoned for refusing to pay a tax I thought supported slavery."
8. \_\_\_\_\_ "I was a black female abolitionist who was also active in the women's suffrage movement."
9. \_\_\_\_\_ "I was 'president' of the Underground Railroad."
10. \_\_\_\_\_ "I helped send 38 free blacks to Sierra Leone in 1812."
11. \_\_\_\_\_ "I helped found the American Colonization Society."
12. \_\_\_\_\_ "I published the antislavery newspaper *The Liberator*."
13. \_\_\_\_\_ "I helped establish the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage."

