

## PART THREE

# *Questioning the Nation,* 1820–1860

### INTRODUCTION: THE REFORMING IMPULSE

During the administrations of the first five presidents, a rapidly growing number of Americans were extraordinarily proud of their young republic. An emergent sense of nationalism was at work as the United States strove to set itself apart from Europe by glorifying its brief history and by creating and reinforcing its myths, unconcerned with facts or evidence. Parson Weems's popular biography of George Washington was the source of the charming fiction of the chopped-down cherry tree and little George's inability to tell a lie, which elevated the first president into a messianic stratosphere. Noah Webster actively promoted American spelling standards to separate the American language from the King's English. Washington Irving's *Sleepy Hollow* tales were widely read and helped create a distinctively American literature.

Nevertheless, pervasive regionalism and divisive forces of sectionalism threatened this evolving yet fragile national identity. In 1819, there were 22 states in the Union—11 slave states, 11 free. This meant that each section had 22 senators. When Missouri applied that year to enter the Union as a slave state, Northerners were alarmed that slaveholding interests would control the Senate. A crisis was averted when the county of York, Massachusetts, was admitted as the free state of Maine simultaneously with the admission of Missouri as a slave state. It was also agreed that any future states carved out of the Louisiana Purchase north of the 36° 30' parallel would be free and that those south of that line would be slave. The Missouri Compromise ensured that, for the time being at least, the balance of power in the Senate would be preserved. However, far from



being a solution, the compromise served only to sweep under the rug the "serpent that was coiled under the table" at the Constitutional Convention—the unresolved issue of slavery.

The antebellum period—roughly from 1820 to 1860—was therefore a time when sectionalism threatened to tear apart the new nation. As more settlers moved west, the issue of slavery continued to fester. Settlers from the North carved new free states out of the western territories. Those from the South, seeking new lands for the cultivation of the country's most lucrative crop, cotton, took their slaves with them into northern Mexico. By 1836, enough slaveholding Americans had moved into the Mexican province of Tejas to instigate a rebellion that secured independence for the Lone Star Republic. Though the urge for expansion was becoming more and more intoxicating, many Northerners were filled with moral indignation over the fact that most settlers in Texas were from the South and appeared to be conspiring to acquire new land for slaveholding. From such new territories, new states would be carved, and this would increase Southern dominance in Congress. To Northerners who already felt that Southerners controlled the Union—all but three of the first ten presidents were from the South, and the three Northern presidents served only one term each—this apparent "conspiracy" to extend slavery was a Southern plot to take over the nation. Still, in 1845, as a fervor swept over the land that it was the United States's "manifest destiny" to conquer the entire North American continent, Texas was admitted to the Union as a slave state. The following year, as Southerners thirsting to spread the cotton kingdom fixed their eyes on the lands of the Southwest and California, the United States went to war with Mexico. By the end of 1848, with Mexico defeated, the United States took the territory that later would be carved into the states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. It is ironic that the expansion of the nation, which appealed to strong nationalist sentiments, widened the gulf between North and South and thrust the explosive issue of slavery, already being stirred up by a burgeoning abolitionist movement, into the foremost place in the nation's consciousness. Manifest destiny led, seemingly inevitably, to disunion.

For Native Americans, of course, manifest destiny meant disaster. No Indian nation had adapted to and accepted the white man's ways more fully than the Cherokee of Georgia, and yet their ancestral lands were uncereemoniously appropriated by President Andrew Jackson against the ruling of the Supreme Court. In spite of their determined resistance, they were forced along the Trail of Tears to a bleak reservation west of the Mississippi. Other tribes, like the Winnebago, and the Sauk and Fox, also attempted to defend themselves from white encroachment, to no avail.

The antebellum period also witnessed a flood of reform movements. Many people, believing in the principles of American democracy, protested against injustice by promoting change. In a sense, this was actually influenced by the intensity of nationalistic sentiment that was particularly highlighted during the

events of 1826. As Americans celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, congratulating themselves on the wonders of democracy, a number of people became acutely aware that their own circumstances, as well as those of others, were preventing them from achieving the equal opportunity that the new American nation had promised. Workers agitated for better wages, a 10-hour day, and universal manhood suffrage, by which all adult white men would be granted the vote without having to meet a property qualification. After William Lloyd Garrison began publishing *The Liberator* in 1831, and Nat Turner's Rebellion later that year, sentiments for and against slavery intensified rapidly. Within another two years, the American Anti-Slavery Society was founded, with tens of thousands of members. By the time of the Mexican War, abolitionists were in a position to exert an enormous influence on the debate over the extension of slavery.

Female abolitionists and their male supporters, recognizing that slaves were not the only people held in subjugation, and infuriated that since the American Revolution women had actually lost ground, began agitating for women's suffrage and equal rights. Many within the abolitionist crusade and the women's movement also raised their dissenting voices against other social problems. They worked for prison and asylum reform, universal education to enable workers and immigrants to assimilate more easily into middle-class society (ironically strengthening class differences), and the temperance crusade to limit alcohol consumption and the concomitant vices of spousal abuse, unemployment, poverty, and crime.

The Romantic Movement and its offspring, transcendentalism, also had a powerful impact on the strivings for reform, especially in the North, where there were serious attempts to erect utopian communities, like Brooke Farm in Massachusetts, New Harmony in Indiana, and the Oneida Community in New York. Each of these utopian experiments sought to rectify the ills of society and to expand notions of democracy by making America more inclusive.

Shortly after the Mexican War had come to an end, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, California. The resulting rush of forty-niners into California swelled the population so rapidly that the territory was ready for admission to the Union before the year was out. Its application to join the Union as a free state would tip the balance in the Senate, and so in 1850 the crisis over the slavery issue again reared its head. By the summer, Congress had worked out the Compromise of 1850: California would be admitted as a free state; other states to be carved out of the Mexican territories would decide for themselves whether they would be slave or free; the slave trade in the District of Columbia would be abolished (but not slavery in the district); and the Fugitive Slave Law would be vigorously enforced, thereby ensuring that Northern states would return escaped slaves to their masters. Again, the basic issue of slavery remained unresolved.

Events began to move rapidly; Senator Stephen A. Douglas, passionate to secure a Northern route for the proposed Transcontinental Railroad through



the territory of Kansas, thereby guaranteeing the development of Chicago as a major railroad hub, proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act to organize those territories under the principle of "popular sovereignty." Recognizing that nothing sounded more agreeable to the American ear than championing the people's right to choose for themselves, Douglas pushed the notion that settlers in the territories should make their own decisions on the issue of slavery when forming a state constitution. Because both Kansas and Nebraska were north of the Missouri Compromise line prohibiting slavery, however, abolitionists immediately and vehemently denounced the proposed act as a devious scheme to extend slavery. Opposition to the act led directly to the founding of the Republican Party, while proslavery and antislavery forces sent settlers to Kansas to gain a majority to elect delegates to a convention to write a state constitution. In 1856, after abolitionist John Brown murdered several proslavery settlers, brutal guerrilla warfare that would last a decade broke out. "Bleeding Kansas" thus became the harbinger of the Civil War.

Other events in the 1850s hastened the country toward civil war. The 1852 publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's heartrending *Uncle Tom's Cabin* opened the eyes of many Americans to the evils of slavery even as it angered Southerners. Senator Charles Sumner's blistering speech on "The Crime Against Kansas" in 1856 led to his being beaten nearly to death in the Senate chamber by an enraged congressman from South Carolina. The Supreme Court's ruling in the Dred Scott case in 1857 declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional and ruled that African Americans had "no rights which the white man was bound to respect." And in 1859 John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, an abortive attempt to incite a slave insurrection, was the final factor convincing both North and South that compromise was no longer possible.

Disunion seemed inescapable.

## Theodore Frelinghuysen (1787-1862)

*Theodore Frelinghuysen, U.S. senator from New Jersey, vice-presidential running mate of Henry Clay in the 1844 election, and later president of Rutgers University, is remembered mostly for his passionate speech to the Senate arguing against the removal of the Cherokee in 1830. Despite Frelinghuysen's efforts, Congress passed the Indian Removal Bill that forced the Cherokee, at bayonet point, from their lands in Georgia and relocated them to a reservation in present-day Oklahoma. It has been estimated that as many as 15,000 of the 60,000 Indians died on the Trail of Tears.*

## SPEECH PROTESTING THE INDIAN REMOVAL BILL, APRIL 9, 1830

... I now proceed to the discussion of those principles which, in my humble judgment, fully and clearly sustain the claims of the Indians to all their political and civil rights, as by them asserted. And here, I insist that, by immemorial possession, as the original tenants of the soil, they hold a title beyond and superior to the British Crown and her colonies, and to all adverse pretensions of our confederation and subsequent Union. God, in his providence, planted these tribes on this Western continent, so far as we know, before Great Britain herself had a political existence. I believe, sir, it is not now seriously denied that the Indians are men, endowed with kindred faculties and powers with ourselves; that they have a place in human sympathy, and are justly entitled to a share in the common bounties of a benignant Providence. And, with this conceded, I ask in what code of the law of nations, or by what process of abstract deduction, their rights have been extinguished?...

In the light of natural law, can a reason for a distinction exist in the mode of enjoying that which is my own? If I use it for hunting, may another take it because he needs it for agriculture? I am aware that some writers have, by a system of artificial reasoning, endeavored to justify, or rather excuse the encroachments made upon Indian territory; and they denominate these abstractions the law of nations, and, in this ready way, the question is despatched. Sir, as we trace the sources of this law, we find its authority to depend either upon the conventions or common consent of nations. And when, permit me to inquire, were the Indian tribes ever consulted on the establishment of such a law?...

Our ancestors found these people, far removed from the commotions of Europe, exercising all the rights, and enjoying the privileges, of free and independent sovereigns of this new world. They were not a wild and lawless horde of banditti, but lived under the restraints of government, patriarchal in its character, and energetic in its influence. They had chiefs, head men, and councils. The white men, the authors of all their wrongs, approached them as friends—they extended the olive branch; and, being then a feeble colony and at the mercy of the native tenants of the soil, by presents and professions, propitiated their good will. The Indian yielded a slow, but substantial confidence; granted to the colonists an abiding place; and suffered them to grow up to man's estate beside him. He never raised the claim of elder title: as the white man's wants increased, he opened the hand of his bounty wider and wider. By and by, conditions are changed. His people melt away; his lands are constantly coveted; millions after millions are ceded. The Indian bears it all meekly; he complains, indeed, as well he may; but suffers on... Do the obligations of justice change with the color of the skin? Is it one of the prerogatives of the white man, that he may disregard the



dictates of moral principles, when an Indian shall be concerned? No, sir . . . , if the contending parties were to exchange positions, place the white man where the Indian stands, load him with all these wrongs, and what path would his outraged feelings strike out for his career? . . . A few pence of duty on tea, that invaded no fireside, excited no fears, disturbed no substantial interest whatever, awakened in the American colonies a spirit of firm resistance; and how was the tea tax met, sir? Just as it should be. There was lurking beneath this trifling imposition of duty, a covert assumption of authority, that led directly to oppressive exactions. "No taxation without representation," became our motto. We would neither pay the tax nor drink the tea. Our fathers buckled on their armor, and, from the water's edge, repelled the encroachments of a misguided cabinet. We successfully and triumphantly contended for the very rights and privileges that our Indian neighbors now implore us to protect and preserve to them. Sir, this thought invests the subject under debate with most singular and momentous interest. We, whom God has exalted to the very summit of prosperity—whose brief career forms the brightest page in history; the wonder and praise of the world; freedom's hope, and her consolation; we, about to turn traitors to our principles and our fame—about to become the oppressors of the feeble, and to cast away our birthright! . . .

The end, however, is to justify the means. "The removal of the Indian tribes to the west of the Mississippi is demanded by the dictates of humanity." This is a word of conciliating import. But it often makes its way to the heart under very doubtful titles, and its present claims deserve to be rigidly questioned. Who urges this plea? They who covet the Indian lands—who wish to rid themselves of a neighbor that they despise, and whose State pride is enlisted in rounding off their territories.

## Cherokee Chief John Ross (1790-1866)

*Although Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen strongly opposed Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Bill that stipulated sending the Cherokee from their native Georgia to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), the bill passed both houses of Congress in 1830. The Cherokee themselves were not silent in standing up for their rights and made a strong effort first to challenge the law and then to forestall enforcement of it. Their case made it all the way to the Supreme Court. In Cherokee Nation v. Georgia and in Worcester v. Georgia, Chief Justice John Marshall ruled in the Cherokee's favor. Unfortunately, a contingent of Cherokee, without the authorization of the Cherokee nation, met with representatives of the U.S. Government at New Echota, Georgia, and signed a removal treaty. Once the Senate ratified the Treaty of New Echota, President Jackson had the authority he needed to force the removal.*

*In 1836, in protest, Cherokee Chief John Ross wrote a letter to Congress denouncing the Treaty of New Echota. His protest was to no avail, and in 1838 the Cherokee began the thousand-mile march along the infamous Trail of Tears.*

### LETTER PROTESTING THE TREATY OF NEW ECHOTA, 1836

TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, RED CLAY COUNCIL GROUND, CHEROKEE NATION, SEPTEMBER 28, 1836

... By the stipulations of this instrument, we are despoiled of our private possessions, the indefeasible property of individuals. We are stripped of every attribute of freedom and eligibility for legal self-defence. Our property may be plundered before our eyes; violence may be committed on our persons; even our lives may be taken away, and there is none to regard our complaints. We are denationalized; we are disfranchised. We are deprived of membership in the human family! We have neither land nor home, nor resting place that can be called our own. And this is effected by the provisions of a compact which assumes the venerated, the sacred appellation of treaty.

We are overwhelmed! Our hearts are sickened, our utterance is paralyzed, when we reflect on the condition in which we are placed, by the audacious practices of unprincipled men, who have managed their stratagems with so much dexterity as to impose on the Government of the United States, in the face of our earnest, solemn, and reiterated protestations.

The instrument in question is not the act of our Nation; we are not parties to its covenants; it has not received the sanction of our people. The makers of it sustain no office nor appointment in our Nation, under the designation of Chiefs, Head men, or any other title, by which they hold, or could acquire, authority to assume the reins of Government, and to make bargain and sale of our rights, our possessions, and our common country. And we are constrained solemnly to declare, that we cannot but contemplate the enforcement of the stipulations of this instrument on us, against our consent, as an act of injustice and oppression, which, we are well persuaded, can never knowingly be countenanced by the Government and people of the United States; nor can we believe it to be the design of these honorable and highminded individuals, who stand at the head of the Govt., to bind a whole Nation, by the acts of a few unauthorized individuals. And, therefore, we, the parties to be affected by the result, appeal with confidence to the justice, the magnanimity, the compassion, of your honorable bodies, against the enforcement, on us, of the provisions of a compact, in the formation of which we have had no agency.



## David Walker (1785–1830)

David Walker was a free North Carolina black who became an ardent and outspoken abolitionist. By the 1820s he had moved to Boston, opened a clothing store, and enjoyed a reputation as a leader of the city's black community of about 1500 people. He helped form the Massachusetts General Colored Association and became a distributor of the first national black newspaper in the United States, *Freedom's Journal*. Then, in 1829, he published his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, which uncompromisingly condemned both the institution of slavery and racism. If whites would not emancipate the slaves, he argued, then the slaves should rise up in revolt: Kill or be killed. Abolitionists worked hard to disseminate thousands of copies of this incendiary pamphlet to slaves throughout the South, and Southerners worked equally hard to prevent its distribution. So outraged were slaveholders that rumors began circulating that the South had put a price on Walker's head, and in June 1830 David Walker was found dead. Historians have established that he probably died of a respiratory disease, but, at the time, it was widely supposed that he had been poisoned.

Walker's *Appeal* is very significant because it marks the transition from the rather mild-mannered antislavery protests of Quakers and moderates to the more zealous and inflammatory antislavery protests of William Lloyd Garrison (who began publication of *The Liberator* in 1831), Theodore Weld, Elijah Lovejoy, Frederick Douglass, and eventually John Brown. When Nat Turner's Rebellion occurred in 1831, Southerners had no doubt that Walker's *Appeal* had instigated it. And so, as the abolitionist crusade became more radical, so, too, did the Southern defense of its peculiar institution.

This excerpt from the *Appeal* is taken from the 1830 edition. (For a longer excerpt see the full edition of *Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation*.)

### APPEAL TO THE COLOURED CITIZENS OF THE WORLD, 1830

Having traveled over a considerable portion of these United States, and having, in the course of my travels, taken the most accurate observations of things as they exist—the result of my observations has warranted the full and unshaken conviction, that we, (coloured people of these United States,) are the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began; and I pray God that none like us ever may live again until time shall be

no more. They tell us of the Israelites in Egypt, the Helots in Sparta, and of the Roman Slaves, which last were made up from almost every nation under heaven, whose sufferings under those ancient and heathen nations, were, in comparison with ours, under this enlightened and Christian nation, no more than a cypher—or, in other words, those heathen nations of antiquity, had but little more among them than the name and form of slavery; while wretchedness and endless miseries were reserved, apparently in a phial, to be poured out upon our fathers, ourselves and our children, by Christian Americans! . . .

I am fully aware, in making this appeal to my much afflicted and suffering brethren, that I shall not only be assailed by those whose greatest earthly desires are, to keep us in abject ignorance and wretchedness, and who are of the firm conviction that Heaven has designed us and our children to be slaves and beasts of burden to them and their children. I say, I do not only expect to be held up to the public as an ignorant, impudent and restless disturber of the public peace, by such avaricious creatures, as well as a mover of insubordination—and perhaps put in prison or to death, for giving a superficial exposition of our miseries, and exposing tyrants. But I am persuaded, that many of my brethren, particularly those who are ignorantly in league with slaveholders or tyrants, who acquire their daily bread by the blood and sweat of their more ignorant brethren—and not a few of those too, who are too ignorant to see an inch beyond their noses, will rise up and call me cursed—Yea, the jealous ones among us will perhaps use more abject subtlety, by affirming that this work is not worth perusing, that we are well situated, and there is no use in trying to better our condition, for we cannot. I will ask one question here.—Can our condition be any worse?—Can it be more mean and abject? If there are any changes, will they not be for the better though they may appear for the worst at first? Can they get us any lower? Where can they get us? They are afraid to treat us worse, for they know well, the day they do it they are gone. But against all accusations which may or can be preferred against me, I appeal to Heaven for my motive in writing—who knows what my object is, if possible, to awaken in the breasts of my afflicted, degraded and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness in this Republican Land of Liberty!!!!!!

The sources from which our miseries are derived, and on which I shall comment, I shall not combine in one, but shall put them under distinct heads and not expose them in their turn; in doing which, keeping truth on my side, and not departing from the strictest rules of morality, I shall endeavour to penetrate, search out, and lay them open for your inspection. If you cannot or will not profit by them, I shall have done my duty to you, my country and my God.

And as the inhuman system of slavery, is the source from which most of our miseries proceed, I shall begin with that curse to nations, which has spread terror and devastation through so many nations of antiquity, and which is raging to such a pitch at the present day in Spain and in Portugal. It had one tug in England, in France, and in the United States of America; yet the inhabitants thereof, do not learn wisdom, and erase it entirely from their dwellings and



from all with whom they have to do. The fact is, the labour of slaves comes so cheap to the avaricious usurers, and is (as they think) of such great utility to the country where it exists, that those who are actuated by sordid avarice only, overlook the evils, which will as sure as the Lord lives, follow after the good. In fact, they are so happy to keep in ignorance and degradation, and to receive the homage and the labour of the slaves, they forget that God rules in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, having his ears continually open to the cries, tears and groans of his oppressed people; and being a just and holy Being will at one day appear fully in behalf of the oppressed, and arrest the progress of the avaricious oppressors; for although the destruction of the oppressors God may not effect by the oppressed, yet the Lord our God will bring other destructions upon them—for not unfrequently will he cause them to rise up one against another, to be split and divided, and to oppress each other, and sometimes to open hostilities with sword in hand. Some may ask, what is the matter with this united and happy people?—Some say it is the cause of political usurers, tyrants, oppressors, But has not the Lord an oppressed and suffering people among them? Does the Lord condescend to hear their cries and see their tears in consequence of oppression? Will he let the oppressors rest comfortably and happy always? Will he not cause the very children of the oppressors to rise up against them, and oftentimes put them to death? “God works in many ways his wonders to perform.” . . .

All persons who are acquainted with history, and particularly the Bible, who are not blinded by the God of this world, and are not actuated solely by avarice—who are able to lay aside prejudice long enough to view candidly and impartially, things as they were, are, and probably will be—who are willing to admit that God made man to serve Him alone, and that man should have no other Lord or Lords but Himself—that God Almighty is the sole proprietor or master of the WHOLE human family, and will not on any consideration admit of a colleague, being unwilling to divide his glory with another—and who can dispense with prejudice long enough to admit that we are men, notwithstanding our prominent noses and woolly heads, and believe that we feel for our fathers, mothers, wives and children, as well as the whites do for theirs.—I say, all who are permitted to see and believe these things, can easily recognize the judgments of God among the Spaniards. Though others may lay the cause of the fierceness with which they cut each other's throats, to some other circumstance, yet they who believe that God is a God of justice, will believe that SLAVERY is the principal cause. . . .

Are we MEN!—I ask you, O my brethren! are we MEN? Did our Creator make us to be slaves to dust and ashes like ourselves? Are they not dying worms as well as we? Have they not to make their appearance before the tribunal of Heaven, to answer for the deeds done in the body, as well as we? Have we any other Master but Jesus Christ alone? Is he not their Master as well as ours?—What right then, have we to obey and call any other Master, but Himself? How we could be so submissive to a gang of men, whom we cannot tell whether they are as good as ourselves or not, I never could conceive. However, this is shut up with the Lord, and we cannot precisely tell—but I declare, we judge men by their works.

The whites have always been an unjust, jealous, unmerciful, avaricious and blood-thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority.—We view them all over the confederacy of Greece, where they were first known to be any thing, (in consequence of education) we see them there, cutting each other's throats—trying to subject each other to wretchedness and misery—to effect which, they used all kinds of deceitful, unfair, and unmerciful means. We view them next in Rome, where the spirit of tyranny and deceit ragged still higher. We view them in Gaul, Spain, and in Britain.—In fine, we view them all over Europe, together with what were scattered about in Asia and Africa, as heathens, and we see them acting more like devils than accountable men. But some may ask, did not the blacks of Africa, and the mulattoes of Asia, go on in the same way as did the whites of Europe. I answer, no—they never were half so avaricious, deceitful and unmerciful as the whites, according to their knowledge.

But we will leave the whites or Europeans as heathens, and take a view of them as Christians, in which capacity we see them as cruel, if not more so than ever. In fact, take them as a body, they are ten times more cruel, avaricious and unmerciful than ever they were; for while they were heathens, they were bad enough it is true, but it is positively a fact that they were not quite so audacious as to go and take vessel loads of men, women and children, and in cold blood, and through devilishness, throw them into the sea, and murder them in all kind of ways. While they were heathens, they were too ignorant for such barbarity. But being Christians, enlightened and sensible, they are completely prepared for such hellish cruelties. Now suppose God were to give them more sense, what would they do? If it were possible, would they not dethrone Jehovah and seat themselves upon his throne? I therefore, in the name and fear of the Lord God of Heaven and of earth, divested of prejudice either on the side of my colour or that of the whites, advance my suspicion of them, whether they are as good by nature as we are or not. Their actions, since they were known as a people, have been the reverse, I do indeed suspect them, but this, as I before observed, is shut up with the Lord, we cannot exactly tell, it will be proved in succeeding generations.—The whites have had the essence of the gospel as it was preached by my master and his apostles—the Ethiopians have not, who are to have it in its meridian splendor—the Lord will give it to them to their satisfaction. I hope and pray my God, that they will make good use of it, that it may be well with them.

## William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879)

*In the years after the American Revolution, Northern states gradually eliminated slavery. By the 1820s, antislavery people were arguing for the gradual emancipation of all slaves through a process whereby the federal government would compensate slaveholders for their property*



and the freedmen would be relocated to Africa. Indeed, during James Monroe's presidency, several thousand freed slaves were sent to the newly established nation of Liberia in West Africa. At this time William Lloyd Garrison was in Baltimore writing for the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, a gradualist antislavery newspaper published by Quaker William Lundy. By 1830, however, Garrison no longer viewed gradualism as a viable strategy to eliminate slavery. He moved to Boston and in January 1831 began publishing his own newspaper, *The Liberator*. In the first issue, he condemned the gradualist approach in no uncertain terms and advocated the immediate abolition of slavery. The intensity of his views and the uncompromising nature of his language alarmed and distressed Southern slaveholders so thoroughly that they began more earnestly defending slavery. By 1832, Garrison had founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society and in 1833 the American Anti-Slavery Society. The state of Georgia offered a \$5000 reward for Garrison's capture, trial, and conviction. In 1835, he was rescued from a proslavery mob that had dragged him through the streets of Boston with a rope around his neck when the mayor intervened and put him in jail. While incarcerated, Garrison wrote on the wall of his cell, "Wm. Lloyd Garrison was put into this cell Wednesday afternoon, October 21, 1835, to save him from the violence of a 'respectable and influential' mob, who sought to destroy him for preaching the abominable and dangerous doctrine that 'all men are created equal. . . .'"

Never afraid to challenge the powers that be, Garrison became increasingly radical in the 1840s and 1850s. One of his most controversial acts was the public burning of a copy of the U.S. Constitution on July 4, 1854. To Garrison, the Constitution, because it acquiesced in the institution of slavery, was "an agreement with death and a covenant with hell." By this time the debate over slavery had become so intense that many Americans began to believe that the only resolution would be through civil war. (For the complete editorial, see the full edition of *Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation*.)

## THE LIBERATOR, VOL. I, NO. I, JANUARY I, 1831

... 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. . . .

William Lloyd Garrison.

## William Apess (1798-1839)

William Apess, a Pequot Indian, was "bound out" (like many other homeless children in the early nineteenth century) to a white family in Massachusetts. By the time he was 15, he had lived with several different white families and had adapted reasonably well to white society. After a stint in the army during the War of 1812, he returned to Connecticut in 1817 and became a lay preacher for several years until his official ordination as a Methodist minister in 1829. In that same year he published *A Son of the Forest* (the first autobiography ever written by an Indian) and then, four years later, a second personal memoir, *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe*. In this book, his essay "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man" is a strong indictment, from a Christian perspective, of the whites' treatment of the Indians. Effectively using the Bible to condemn racism, Apess became one of the most articulate nineteenth-century Indian protest voices. While continuing to work for Indian rights in the 1830s, he published two more important protest works: *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts*, Relative to the Marshpee [sic] Tribe (1835) and *Eulogy on King Philip* (1836). But after this last book was published, he seems to have dropped out of sight, and very little is known about the rest of his life. (For a longer version of this essay, see the full edition of *Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation*.)



## "AN INDIAN'S LOOKING-GLASS FOR THE WHITE MAN," 1833

Having a desire to place a few things before my fellow creatures who are traveling with me to the grave, and to that God who is the maker and preserver both of the white man and the Indian, whose abilities are the same and who are to be judged by one God, who will show no favor to outward appearances but will judge righteousness. Now I ask if degradation has not been heaped long enough upon the Indians? And if so, can there not be a compromise? Is it right to hold and promote prejudices? If not, why not put them all away? I mean here, among those who are civilized. It may be that many are ignorant of the situation of many of my brethren with the limits of New England. Let me for a few moments turn your attention to the reservations in the different states of New England, and, with but few exceptions, who shall find them as follows: the most mean, abject, miserable race of beings in the world—a complete place of prodigality and prostitution.

Let a gentleman and lady of integrity and respectability visit these places, and they would be surprised; as they wandered from one hut to the other they would view, with the females who are left alone, children half-starved and some almost as naked as they came into the world. And it is a fact that I have seen them as much so—while the females are left without protection, and are seduced by white men, and are finally left to be common prostitutes for them and to be destroyed by that burning, fiery curse, that has swept millions, both of red and white men, into the grave with sorrow and disgrace—rum. One reason why they are left so is because their most sensible and active men are absent at sea. Another reason is because they are made to believe they are minors and have not the abilities given them from God to take care of themselves, without it is to see to a few little articles, such as baskets and brooms. Their land is in common stock, and they have nothing to make them enterprising.

Another reason is because those men who are Agents, many of them are unfaithful and care not whether the Indians live or die; they are much imposed upon by their neighbors, who have no principle. They would think it no crime to go upon Indian lands and cut and carry off their most valuable timber, or anything else they chose; and I doubt not but they think it clear gain. Another reason is because they have no education to take care of themselves; if they had, I would risk them to take care of their own property.

Now I will ask if the Indians are not called the most ingenious people among us. And are they not said to be men of talents? And I would ask: Could there be a more efficient way to distress and murder them by inches than the way they have taken? And there is no people in the world but who may be destroyed in the same way. Now, if these people are what they are held up in our view to be, I would take the liberty to ask why they are not brought forward and pains taken

to educate them, to give them all a common education, and those of the brightest and first-rate talents put forward and held up to office. Perhaps some unholy, unprincipled men would cry out, "The skin was not good enough"; but stop, friends—I am not talking about the skin but about principles. I would ask if there cannot be as good feelings and principles under a red skin as there can be under a white. And let me ask: Is it not on the account of a bad principle that we who are red children have had to suffer so much as we have? And let me ask: Did not this bad principle proceed from the whites or their forefathers? And I would ask: Is it worthwhile to nourish it any longer? If not then let us have a change, although some men no doubt will spout their corrupt principles against it, that are in the halls of legislation and elsewhere. But I presume this kind of talk will seem surprising and horrible. I do not see why it should so long as they (the whites) say that they think as much of us as they do of themselves.

This I have heard repeatedly, from the most respectable gentlemen and ladies—and having heard so much precept, I should now wish to see the example. And I would ask who has a better right to look for these things than the naturalist himself—the candid man would say none.

I know that many say they are willing, perhaps the majority of the people, that we should enjoy our rights and privileges as they do. If so, I would ask, Why are not we protected in our persons and property throughout the Union? Is it not because there reigns in the breast of many who are leaders a most unrighteous, unbecoming, and impure black principle, and as corrupt and unholy as it can be—while these very same unfeeling, self-esteemed characters pretend to take the skin as a pretext to keep us from our unalienable and lawful rights? I would ask you if you would like to be disfranchised from all your rights, merely because your skin is white, and for no other crime. I'll venture to say, these very characters who hold the skin to be such a barrier in the way would be the first to cry out, "Injustice! awful injustice!"

But, reader, I acknowledge that this is a confused world, and I am not seeking for office, but merely placing before you the black inconsistency that you place before me—which is ten times blacker than any skin that you will find in the universe. And now let me exhort you to do away with that principle, as it appears ten times worse in the sight of God and candid men than skins of color—more disgraceful than all the skins that Jehovah ever made. If black or red skins or any other skin of color is disgraceful to God, it appears that he has disgraced himself a great deal—for he has made fifteen colored people to one white and placed them here upon this earth.

Now let me ask you, white man, if it is a disgrace for to eat, drink, and sleep with the image of God, or sit, or walk and talk with them. Or have you the folly to think that the white man, being one in fifteen or sixteen, are the only beloved images of God? Assemble all nations together in your imagination, and then let the whites be seated among them, and then let us look for the whites, and I doubt not it would be hard finding them; for to the rest of the nations, they are still but a handful. Now suppose these skins were put together, and each skin has its national crimes written upon it—which skin do you think would have the



greatest? I will ask one question more. Can you charge the Indians with robbing a nation almost of their whole continent, and murdering their women and children, and then depriving the remainder of their lawful rights, that nature and God require them to have? And to cap the climax, rob another nation to till their grounds and welter out their days under the lash with hunger and fatigue under the scorching rays of a burning sun? I should look at all the skins, and I know that when I cast my eye upon that white skin, and if I saw those crimes written upon it, I should enter my protest against it immediately and cleave to that which is more honorable. And I can tell you that I am satisfied with the manner of my creation, fully—whether others are or not. . . .

## Laborers of Boston

*Although many contemporaries, as well as later historians, have called the Jacksonian era the Age of the Common Man because of the elimination of property qualifications for white men's right to vote and because of President Jackson's assault on the moneyed interests of the Northeast, it was a time of considerable inequality and exploitation of the lower classes. Many workers, including the Lowell Mill girls (in 1834), began agitating against exploitive employers and sought to improve their working conditions, wages, and hours. In 1835, in Boston, after three strikes had vainly sought to reduce the work day from 13 hours to 10, a group of carpenters, masons, and stonecutters issued a circular in which they once again articulated their position. (For a longer version of this circular, see the full edition of Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation.)*

### TEN-HOUR CIRCULAR, 1835

... In the name of the Carpenters, Masons, and Stone Cutters, [we] do respectfully represent—

That we are now engaged in a cause, which is not only of vital importance to ourselves, our families, and our children, but is equally interesting and equally important to every Mechanic in the United States and the whole world. We are contending for the recognition of the Natural Right to dispose of our own time in such quantities as we deem and believe to be most conducive to our own happiness, and the welfare of all those engaged in Manual Labor.

SOURCE: Irving Mark and E. I. Schwaab, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1952), 342–343.

The work in which we are now engaged is neither more nor less than a contest between Money and Labor: Capital, which can only be made productive by labor, is endeavoring to crush labor the only source of all wealth.

We have been too long subjected to the odious, cruel, unjust, and tyrannical system which compels the operative Mechanic to exhaust his physical and mental powers by excessive toil, until he has no desire but to eat and sleep, and in many cases he has no power to do either from extreme debility.

We contend that no man or body of men have a right to require of us that we should toil as we have hitherto done under the old system of labor.

We go further. No man or body of men who require such excessive labor can be friends to the country or the Rights of Man. We also say, that we have rights, and we have duties to perform as American Citizens and members of society, which forbid us to dispose of more than Ten Hours for a day's work.

We cannot, we will not, longer be mere slaves to inhuman, insatiable and unprincipled avarice. We have taken a firm and decided stand, to obtain the acknowledgment of those rights to enable us to perform those duties to God, our Country and ourselves. . . .

Beware also of the offers of high wages. We have not asked for an increase of wages, but are willing that demand and supply should govern the price as it does that of all other disposable property. To induce you to assist them to form shackles and fetters for your own limbs and your own minds, they offer you an increase of wages. Will you be deceived by this old and shallow artifice? We believe you will not—we know you will not.

When you understand that we are contending for your rights, for the rights of your families and your children as well as our own, we feel full confidence that you will make no movement to retard the accomplishment of the glorious and holy enterprise, both yours and ours. It is for the rights of humanity we contend. . . .

### Angelina Grimké (1805–1879) and Sarah Grimké (1792–1873)

*Angelina and Sarah Grimké, daughters of a South Carolina slaveholder, disapproved of slavery all their lives. In the 1820s, the sisters moved to Philadelphia, where they became Quakers and eventually prominent abolitionists and feminists. In the 1830s, William Lloyd Garrison published one of Angelina's letters in his newspaper The Liberator, and shortly thereafter both sisters began traveling to speak at antislavery meetings. In 1836, Angelina published her first pamphlet, an appeal to Southern women to join the abolition crusade, not only because the*



institution was evil but also because slave owners were fathering children with their slaves. Slavery, thus, was destroying the sanctity of marriage and driving white women deeper into subjection. This pamphlet caused quite a furor among a population that was horrified that a woman should be so outspoken—especially about such a volatile issue. As both sisters continued to speak publicly and publish impassioned indictments of slavery, they were increasingly attacked, even by other abolitionists, because of their gender. The attacks convinced the sisters that they had to become feminists as well as abolitionists.

In the following excerpts (longer versions are in the full edition of Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation) from Angelina Grimké's Appeal to the Christian Women of the South and Sarah Grimké's "The Original Equality of Woman," the sisters tackle the popular arguments that made use of the Bible to validate the institution of slavery and the subjugation of women.

## APPEAL TO THE CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF THE SOUTH, 1836

### RESPECTED FRIENDS,

... All that sophistry of argument which has been employed to prove, that although it is sinful to send to Africa to procure men and women as slaves, who have never been in slavery, that still, it is not sinful to keep those in bondage who have come down by inheritance, will be utterly overthrown. We must come back to the good old doctrine of our forefathers who declared to the world, "this self evident truth that all men are created equal, and that they have certain inalienable rights among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It is even a greater absurdity to suppose a man can be legally born a slave under our free Republican Government, than under the petty despotisms of barbarian Africa. If then, we have no right to enslave an African, surely we can have none to enslave an American; if it is a self evident truth that all men, every where and of every color are born equal, and have an inalienable right to liberty, then it is equally true that no man can be born a slave, and no man can ever rightfully be reduced to involuntary bondage and held as a slave, however fair may be the claim of his master or mistress through wills and title-deeds.

But after all, it may be said, our fathers were certainly mistaken, for the Bible sanctions Slavery, and that is the highest authority. Now the Bible is my ultimate appeal on all matters of faith and practice, and it is to this test I am anxious to bring the subject at issue between us. Let us then begin with Adam and examine the charter of privileges which was given to him. "Have dominion over the fish of

the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." In the eighth Psalm we have a still fuller description of this charter which through Adam was given to all mankind. "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet. All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." And after the flood when this charter of human rights was renewed, we find no additional power vested in man. "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea, into your hand are they delivered." In this charter, although the different kinds of irrational beings are so particularly enumerated, and supreme dominion over all of them is granted, yet man is never vested with this dominion over his fellow man; he was never told that any of the human species were put under his feet; it was only all things, and man, who was created in the image of his Maker, never can properly be termed a thing, though the laws of Slave States do call him "a chattel personal." Man, then I assert never was put under the feet of man, by that first charter of human rights which was given by God, to the Fathers of the Antediluvian and Postdiluvian worlds, therefore this doctrine of equality is based on the Bible.

But it may be argued, that in the very chapter of Genesis from which I have last quoted, will be found the curse pronounced upon Canaan, by which his posterity was consigned to servitude under his brothers Shem and Japheth. I know this prophecy was uttered, was most fearfully and wonderfully fulfilled, through the immediate descendants of Canaan, i.e. the Canaanites, and I do not know but that it has been through all the children of Ham, but I do know that prophecy does not tell us what ought to be, but what actually does take place, ages after it has been delivered, and that if we justify America for enslaving the children of Africa, we must also justify Egypt for reducing the children of Israel to bondage, for the latter was foretold as explicitly as the former. I am well aware that prophecy has often been urged as an excuse for Slavery, but be not deceived, the fulfillment of prophecy will not cover one sin in the awful day of account. Hear what our Saviour says on this subject; "it must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man through whom they come"—Witness some fulfillment of this declaration in the tremendous destruction of Jerusalem, occasioned by that most nefarious of all crimes the crucifixion of the Son of God. Did the fact of that event having been foretold, exculpate the Jews from sin in perpetuating it? No—for hear what the Apostle Peter says to them on this subject, "Him being delivered by the determine counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Other striking instances might be adduced, but these will suffice....

But I will now say a few words on the subject of Abolitionism. Doubtless you have all heard Anti-Slavery societies denounced as insurrectionary and mischievous, fanatical and dangerous. It has been said they publish the most abominable untruths, and that they are endeavoring to excite rebellions at the South. Have you believed these reports, my friends? Have you also been deceived by these false assertions? Listen to me, then, whilst I endeavor to wipe from the fair character of



Abolitionism such unfounded accusations. You know that I am a Southerner; you know that my dearest relatives are now in a slave State. Can you for a moment believe I would prove so recreant to the feelings of a daughter and a sister, as to join a society which was seeking to overthrow slavery by falsehood, bloodshed, and murder? I appeal to you who have known and loved me in days that are passed, can you believe it? No! my friends. As a Carolinian, I was peculiarly jealous of any movements on this subject; and before I would join an Anti-Slavery Society, I took the precaution of becoming acquainted with some of the leading Abolitionists, of reading their publications and attending their meetings, at which I heard addresses both from colored and white men; and it was not until I was fully convinced that their principles were *entirely pacific*, and their efforts *only moral*, that I gave my name as a member to the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia. Since that time, I have regularly taken the Liberator, and read many Anti-Slavery pamphlets and papers and books, and can assure you I *never* have seen a single insurrectionary paragraph, and never read any account of cruelty which I could not believe. Southerners may deny the truth of these accounts, but why do they not *prove* them to be false. Their violent expressions of horror at such accounts being believed, *may* deceive some, but they cannot deceive *me*, for I lived too long in the midst of slavery, not to know what slavery is. When I speak of this system "I speak that I do know," and I am not at all afraid to assert, that Anti-Slavery publications have *not* overdrawn the monstrous features of slavery at all. And many a Southerner *knows* this as well as I do. A lady in North Carolina remarked to a friend of mine, about eighteen months since, "Northerners know nothing at all about slavery; they think it is perpetual bondage only; but of the *depth of degradation* that word involves, they have no conception; if they had, *they would never cease* their efforts until so *horrible* a system was overthrown." She did not know how faithfully some Northern men and Northern women had studied this subject; how diligently they had searched out the cause of "him who had none to help him," and how fearlessly they had told the story of the negro's wrongs. Yes, Northerners know *every* thing about slavery now. This monster of iniquity has been unveiled to the world, her frightful features unmasked, and soon, very soon will she be regarded with no more complacency by the American republic than is the idol of Juggernaut, rolling its bloody wheels over the crushed bodies of its prostrate victims.

... Slavery then is a national sin.

But you will say, a great many other Northerners tell us so, who can have no political motives. The interests of the North, you must know, my friends, are very closely combined with those of the South. The Northern merchants and manufacturers are making *their* fortunes out of the *produce of slave labor*; the grocer is selling your rice and sugar; how then can these men bear a testimony against slavery without condemning themselves? But there is another reason, the North is most dreadfully afraid of Amalgamation. She is alarmed at the very idea of a thing so monstrous, as she thinks. And lest this consequence *might* flow from emancipation, she is determined to resist all efforts at emancipation without expatriation. It is not because *she approves of slavery*, or believes it to be

"corner stone of our republic," for she is as much *anti-slavery* as we are, but amalgamation is too horrible to think of. Now I would ask *you*, is it right, is it generous, to refuse the colored people in this country the advantages of education and the privilege, or rather the *right*, to follow honest trades and callings merely because they are colored? The same prejudice exists here against our colored brethren that existed against the Gentiles in Judea. Great numbers cannot bear the idea of equality, and fearing lest, if they had the same advantages we enjoy, they would become as intelligent, as moral, as religious, and as respectable and wealthy, they are determined to keep them as low as they possibly can. Is this doing as they would be done by? Is this loving their neighbor as *themselves*? Oh! that *such* opposers of Abolitionism would put their souls in the stead of the free colored man's and obey the apostolic injunction, to "remember them that are in bonds *as bound with them*." I will leave you to judge whether the fear of amalgamation ought to induce men to oppose anti-slavery efforts, when *they* believe *slavery* to be *sinful*. Prejudice against color, is the most powerful enemy we have to fight with at the North.

You need not be surprised, then, at all, at what is said *against* Abolitionists by the North, for they are wielding a two-edged sword, which even here, cuts through the *cords of caste*, on the one side and the *bonds of interest* on the other. They are only sharing the fate of other reformers, abused and reviled whilst they are in the minority; but they are neither angry nor discouraged by the invective which has been heaped upon them by slaveholders at the South and their apologists at the North....

There is nothing to fear from immediate Emancipation, but *every thing* from the consequences of slavery....

### "THE ORIGINAL EQUALITY OF WOMAN," 1837

... We must first view woman at the period of her creation. "And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female, created he them." [Gen. 1:26-27]. In all this sublime description of the creation of man, (which is a generic term including man and woman), there is not one particle of difference intimated as existing between them. They were both made in the image of God; dominion was given to both over every other creature, but not over each other. Created in perfect equality, they were expected to exercise the vicegerence intrusted to them by their Maker, in harmony and love.

SOURCE: Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman*, Addressed to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1838; Larry Ceplair, ed., *The Public Years of Sarah and Angelina Grimké: Selected Writings 1835-1839* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 205-207.



Let us pass on now to the recapitulation of the creation of man—"The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the Lord God said, it is not good that man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him" [Gen. 2:7-18]. All creation swarmed with animated beings capable of natural affection, as we know they still are; it was not, therefore, merely to give man a creature susceptible of loving, obeying, and looking up to him, for all that the animals could do and did do. It was to give him a companion, *in all respects his equal*, one who was like himself a *free agent*, gifted with intellect and endowed with immortality; not a partaker merely of his animal gratifications, but able to enter into all his feelings as a moral and responsible being. If this had not been the case, how could she have been an help meet for him? I understand this as applying not only to the parties entering into the marriage contract, but to all men and women, because I believe God designed woman to be an help meet for man in every good and perfect work. She was a part of himself, as if Jehovah designed to make the oneness and identity of man and woman perfect and complete; and when the glorious work of their creation was finished, "the morning stars stand together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" [Job 38:7]. . . .

Here then I plant myself. God created us equal;—he created us free agents;—he is our Lawgiver, our King, and our Judge, and to him alone is woman bound to be in subjection, and to him alone is she accountable for the use of those talents with which her Heavenly Father has entrusted her.

## Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller had an enormous impact on thinking in the first half of the nineteenth century. Transcendental philosophy grew out of the romantic movement, which, in rejecting the Enlightenment's veneration of reason, had emphasized the ineffable beauty of nature and spirit.

Going a step further, transcendentalists urged individuals to transcend the confines of book learning and formal knowledge and cultivate instead the innate ability of each person to know beauty and truth. Each of us must become aware of our original connection to the universe, to nature, to life. We must learn who we are and become conscious that there is a spark of divinity within each individual. Our souls are part of the "Oversoul." And in this sense, each individual is interconnected with all of nature. But this does not mean that we are to be concerned only with ourselves. We must also be engaged in the world, for we are a part of the world. Since we are all part of the godhead, there is no fundamental difference between humans. Masculine and feminine principles exist in each individual, and it is through the union of the masculine and the

feminine that humankind can discover the path to a truly new utopian humanity. The soul, the spirit, and the mind, therefore, favor no gender, no class, and no race. It is not surprising that transcendentalists were among the most outspoken advocates of abolitionism and feminism.

The title of Emerson's "Essay on Self-Reliance" is self-explanatory. Each person, according to Emerson, in order to live a full, meaningful life, must not conform to society but instead cultivate self-reliance.

(For a much longer extract from this essay, as well as Emerson's speech denouncing the Fugitive Slave Law, see the full edition of *Disseminations* in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation.)

### "SELF-RELIANCE," 1841

. . . To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men,—that is genius. . . . A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else, to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried. . . .

Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genius of their age, betraying their perception that the absolutely trustworthy was seated at their heart, working through their hands, predominating in all their being. And we are now men, and must accept in the highest mind the same transcendent destiny; and not minors and invalids in a protected corner, not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but guides, redeemers, and



benefactors, obeying the Almighty effort, and advancing on Chaos and the Dark.

... Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs.

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist. He who would gather immortal palms must not be hindered by the name of goodness, but must explore if it be goodness.

Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind. Absolve you to yourself, and you shall have the suffrage of the world. I remember an answer which when quite young I was prompted to make to a valued adviser, who was wont to importune me with the dear old doctrines of the church. On my saying, What have I to do with the sacredness of traditions, if I live wholly from within? my friend suggested,—"But these impulses may be from below, not from above." I replied, "They do not seem to me to be such; but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil." No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. Good and bad are but names very readily transferable to that or this; the only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong what is against it. A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition, as if every thing were titular and ephemeral but he. I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to badges and names, to large societies and dead institutions. Every decent and well-spoken individual affects and sways me more than is right. I ought to go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways....

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

The objection to conforming to usages that have become dead to you is, that it scatters your force. It loses your time and blurs the impression of your character. If you maintain a dead church, contribute to a dead Bible-society, vote with a great party either for the government or against it, spread your table like base housekeepers,—under all these screens I have difficulty to detect the precise man you are. And, of course, so much force is withdrawn from your proper life. But do your work, and I shall know you. Do your work, and you shall reinforce yourself. A man must consider what a blindman's-buff is this game of conformity. If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument. I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his church. Do I not know beforehand that not possibly can he say a new and spontaneous word? Do I not know that, with all this ostentation of examining the grounds of the institution, he will do no such thing? Do I not

know that he is pledged to himself not to look but at one side,—the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister? He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench are the emptiest affectation. Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief, and attached themselves to some one of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their every truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two, their four not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us, and we know not where to begin to set them right. Meantime nature is not slow to equip us in the prison-uniform of the party to which we adhere. We come to wear one cut of face and figure, and acquire by degrees the gentlest asinine expression. There is a mortifying experience in particular, which does not fail to wreak itself also in the general history; I mean "the foolish face of praise," the forced smile which we put on in company where we do not feel at ease in answer to conversation which does not interest us. The muscles, not spontaneously moved, but moved by a low usurping willfulness, grow tight about the outline of the face with the most disagreeable sensation.

For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure. And therefore a man must know how to estimate a sour face. The by-standers look askance on him in the public street or in the friend's parlour. If this aversion had its origin in contempt and resistance like his own, he might well go home with a sad countenance; but the sour faces of the multitude, like their sweet faces, have no deep cause, but are put on and off as the wind blows and a newspaper directs. Yet is the discontent of the multitude more formidable than that of the senate and the college. It is easy enough for a firm man who knows the world to brook the rage of the cultivated classes. Their rage is decorous and prudent, for they are timid as being very vulnerable themselves. But when to their feminine rage the indignation of the people is added, when the ignorant and the poor are aroused, when the unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society is made to growl and mow, it needs the habit of magnanimity and religion to treat it godlike as a trifle of no concernment.

The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a reverence for our past act or word, because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loath to disappoint them.

But why should you keep your head over your shoulder? Why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat you have stated in this or that public place? Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then? It seems to be a rule of wisdom never to rely on your memory alone, scarcely even in acts of pure memory, but to bring the past for judgment into the thousand-eyed present, and live ever in a new day. In your metaphysics you have denied personality to the Deity; yet when the devout motions of the soul come, yield to them heart and life, though they should clothe the God with shape and color. Leave your theory, as Joseph his coat in the hand of the harlot, and flee.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply



nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said to-day.—“Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood.”—Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood....

I hope in these days we have heard the last of conformity and consistency....

## Margaret Fuller (1810-1850)

During the 1830s, Margaret Fuller lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she was part of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau's transcendentalist circle. In 1840, Fuller and Emerson founded a literary journal, *The Dial*, which Fuller edited until 1844, when she accepted Horace Greeley's offer to become the book review editor of the *New York Tribune*. In 1846, she moved to Europe as the *Tribune's* foreign correspondent, and in 1848 she became involved in the Italian revolution. Returning to the United States in 1850, she drowned when her ship sank during a hurricane within sight of land at Fire Island, New York.

Despite her short life, Margaret Fuller was an influential transcendentalist and feminist. Her ardent plea for women's rights, "The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men, Woman versus Women," was published in *The Dial* in 1843, and then in 1845 it was incorporated in her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. (A longer extract is in the full edition of *Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation*.) Like Emerson and Thoreau, Margaret Fuller argued that the United States was a land of hypocrisy that did not live up to its self-proclaimed ideals and that the path to equality and liberty was through self-reliance and personal enlightenment. She argued also that women must gain economic independence in order to achieve equality.

## WOMAN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, PART 3, 1844

... The especial genius of Woman I believe to be electrical in movement, intuitive in function, spiritual in tendency. She excels not so easily in classification, or recreation, as in an instinctive seizure of causes, and a simple breathing out of what she receives, that has the singleness of life, rather than the selecting and energizing of art.

SOURCE: Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Greeley and McElrath, 1845).

More native is it to her to be the living model of the artist than to set apart from herself any one form in objective reality; more native to inspire and receive the poem, than to create it. In so far as soul is in her completely developed, all soul is the same; but in so far as it is modified in her as Woman, it flows, it breathes, it sings, rather than deposits soil, or finishes work; and that which is especially feminine flushes, in blossom, the face of earth, and pervades, like air and water, all this seeming solid globe, daily renewing and purifying its life. Such may be the especially feminine element spoken of as *Femality*. But it is no more the order of nature that it should be incarnated pure in any form, than that the masculine energy should exist unmingled with it in any form.

Male and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman.

... Yet sight comes first, and of this sight of the world of causes, this approximation to the region of primitive motions, women I hold to be especially capable. Even without equal freedom with the other sex, they have already shown themselves so; and should these faculties have free play, I believe they will open new, deeper and purer sources of joyous inspiration than have as yet refreshed the earth.

Let us be wise, and not impede the soul. Let her work as she will. Let us have one creative energy, one incessant revelation. Let it take what form it will, and let us not bind it by the past to man or woman, black or white....

Every relation, every gradation of nature is incalculably precious, but only to the soul which is poised upon itself, and to whom no loss, no change, can bring dull discord, for it is in harmony with the central soul.

If any individual live too much in relations, so that he becomes a stranger to the resources of his own nature, he falls, after a while, into a distraction, or imbecility, from which he can only be cured by a time of isolation, which gives the renovating fountains time to rise up. With a society it is the same. Many minds, deprived of the traditional or instinctive means of passing a cheerful existence, must find help in self-impulse, or perish. It is therefore that, while any elevation, in the view of union, is to be hailed with joy, we shall not decline celibacy as the great fact of the time. It is one from which no vow, no arrangement, can at present save a thinking mind. For now the rowers are pausing on their oars; they wait a change before they can pull together. All tends to illustrate the thought of a wise contemporary. Union is only possible to those who are units. To be fit for relations in time, souls, whether of Man or Woman, must be able to do without them in the spirit.

It is therefore that I would have Woman lay aside all thought, such as she habitually cherishes, of being taught and led by men. I would have her, like the Indian girl, dedicate herself to the Sun, the Sun of Truth, and go nowhere if his beams did not make clear the path. I would have her free from compromise, from complaisance, from helplessness, because I would have her good enough and strong enough to love one and all beings, from the fulness, not the poverty of being.

Men, as at present instructed, will not help this work, because they also are under the slavery of habit....



## Lowell Mill Girls

In the early 1830s, in an effort to increase production, textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, began an experiment in which young farm women were hired in large numbers. At a time when the idea of young, unmarried women working and living away from home was scandalous, the mill provided a safe and secure environment. The girls resided in supervised housing, were given boardinghouse-style meals, followed a strict dress and behavior code, and were expected to attend educational lectures and expand their minds by using the library. This uncommon opportunity for women to leave home and earn money in a secure setting created a great deal of camaraderie among them, and the Lowell Mills thrived. However, in 1834, when increasing competition forced the mills to cut wages, the tight-knit Lowell Mill girls decided to strike. The strike was unsuccessful, as was a second strike in 1836, but the workers showed that they had a strong sense of their own interests and were not timid about attempting to organize. In 1846, they struck again, and this time they were partially successful. One of the Lowell employees, Sarah Bagley, founded the Lowell Female Labor Association in 1844 and became a staunch labor reformer who helped to guide the Lowell Mill girls as they called for a 10-hour workday and increased wages. Thus, although women were a minority in the workforce of the nineteenth century, some of the earliest attempts at labor organization were spearheaded by working women.

In 1846, Sarah Bagley and others wrote a constitution for their union, and in 1847, after they changed their name to Lowell Female Industrial Reform and Mutual Aid Society, they wrote this constitution.

### LOWELL FEMALE INDUSTRIAL REFORM AND MUTUAL AID SOCIETY, 1847

The following Preamble and Constitution having been adopted, we would most strongly urge upon every female operative, as well as others who are compelled by necessity to support themselves of this opportunity to help us in this humane enterprise: Let us unite together and protect each other. In health and prosperity we can enjoy each other's society from week to week—in sickness and despondency share in and kindly relieve each other's distresses. The young

and defenceless female, far away from home and loving hearts, can here find true sympathy and aid. We do hope and confidently believe that many of our toiling sisters will come in next Tuesday, sign the Constitution, and engage heart and hand in this benevolent cause.

Our meetings will be holden every Tuesday evening, at eight o'clock, at the Reading Room, 76 Central street. The officers for the coming year will be chosen Jan. 12. Let there be full attendance. Now is the time for ACTION.

H. J. Stone, Sec'y.

#### PREAMBLE

The time having come when the claims of Industry and the Rights of all, are engrossing the deep attention, the profoundest thought and energetic action of the wisest and best in this and other lands—when the worthy toiling millions of earth are waking from the deathlike stupor which has so long held them in ignorance and degradation, to a sense of their true dignity and worth as God's free men and women, destined to eternal progression and ultimate perfection, we, females of Lowell, feel that we also have a work to accomplish—a high and holy destiny to achieve. We deem it a privilege and also a *duty* we owe to ourselves and our race, to lend a helping hand, feeble though it may be, to assist in carrying forward the great "Industrial Reform" already commenced, and which is progressing with such unlooked for success, in the Old and New World. To assist in scattering light and knowledge among the people—to encourage in every good word and work, those who are devoting themselves, and all that they have, to the cause of human elevation and human happiness.

We feel that by our mutual, *united* action, and with the blessing of high heaven, we can accomplish much, which shall tell for the progress of Industrial Reform—the elevation and cultivation of mind and morals, in our midst—the comfort and relief of destitute and friendless females in this busy city.

With this high aim and these noble objects in view, we most solemnly pledge ourselves to labor actively, energetically and unitedly, to bring about a better state of society. In order the more successfully to accomplish these objects, we adopt the following:

#### CONSTITUTION

ART. I. This Association shall be called the LOWELL FEMALE INDUSTRIAL REFORM AND MUTUAL AID SOCIETY.

ART. II. The objects of this Society shall be the diffusion of correct principles and useful practical knowledge among its members—the rendering of Industry honorable and attractive—the relieving and aiding of all who may be sick, or in want of the comforts and necessities of life, or standing in need of the counsels and sympathies of true and benevolent hearts. Also to encourage and assist each other in self-culture, intellectual and moral, that we may be fitted for



and occupy that station in society, which the truly good and useful ever should. That we may know and respect our own individual rights and privileges as females, and be prepared, understandingly, to maintain and enjoy them, irrespective of concentrated wealth or aristocratic usages of an anti-republican state of society.

ART. III. Any female can become a member by signing the Constitution and paying an initiation fee of fifty cents.

ART. IV. The officers of this society shall consist of a President, two Vice Presidents, Secretary, Treasurer and Board of Directors, four in number, all of which officers shall be members, ex-officio, of the Board.

ART. V. It shall be the duty of the President to preside at all meetings of the Society, and in case of absence, the Vice President shall fill the chair.

ART. VI. It shall be the duty of the Secretary to be present at all meetings, and prepared to read the minutes of the previous meeting, if requested.

ART. VII. It shall be the duty of the Treasurer to receive all money paid into the Treasury, and to pay all bills presented by the Society and signed by the President and Secretary; also to keep a correct amount of the same.

ART. VIII. It shall be the duty of the Board to appoint a Charitable Committee the first Tuesday of each month, or oftener if necessary.

ART. IX. That Committee shall be styled the Sisters of Charity. It shall be their duty to ascertain who is needy or sick in the Society, and report the same at each meeting, that their wants may be attended to faithfully, their hearts cheered by the voice of sympathy and love. It shall also be their duty to furnish watchers for the sick so long as deemed necessary.

ART. X. Every member shall deposit not less than six cents weekly in the hands of the Treasurer, which sum, with the initiation fee and fines, shall go to make up a sick fund, which shall be appropriated no other way, except by vote of two thirds of the Board.

ART. XI. No member shall draw from this fund until she has contributed to the same three months the amount specified in article tenth; and then not less than two nor over five dollars a week, or longer than four weeks, unless the Board see fit to order otherwise.

ART. XII. Any member who shall absent herself from the meetings three weeks in succession, without a reasonable excuse, shall be subjected to a fine of thirty-seven and a half cents per week. If at the end of three months said

member does not come in and pay up her fines, she shall not be entitled to any of the benefits of the sick fund.

ART. XIII. The officers of this Society shall be chosen on the first Tuesdays of January and July, two weeks notice being previously given.

ART. XIV. This Constitution may be altered or amended by a vote of two thirds of the members present, provided it be proposed at a previous meeting.

## Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

*Elizabeth Cady Stanton, an abolitionist and an advocate of women's rights, sailed with her husband to London in 1840 to attend the World Anti-Slavery Convention. After making the arduous voyage, she was dismayed and angered to discover that women were not allowed to speak at the convention. In a sense, this was an epiphany for her, a revelation that the fight for women's rights was at least as important as the fight against slavery. At the convention, she met Lucretia Mott, and the two women resolved that they would arrange a women's rights convention in the United States. In July 1848, 300 women and 40 men gathered in Seneca Falls, New York, to "discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women." The principal outcome of this convention was the "Declaration of Sentiments." Modeling the manifesto on the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, Stanton called not only for women's suffrage but also for complete social and economic equality and a restructuring of societal stereotypes about the roles of the two sexes. Though the Seneca Falls declaration kicked off the modern women's movement, the struggle for women's rights remained in the background during the 1850s, as the crusade against slavery took center stage. At the end of the Civil War, Stanton and Mott, along with Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and many others, focused their considerable energies on women's rights.*

## SPEECH AT SENECA FALLS, JULY 19, 1848

... [W]e are assembled to protest against a form of government existing without the consent of the governed—to declare our right to be free as man is free, to be represented in the government which we are taxed to support, to have such



disgraceful laws as give man the power to chastise and imprison his wife, to take the wages which she earns, the property which she inherits, and, in case of separation, the children of her love; laws which make her the mere dependent on his bounty. It is to protest against such unjust laws as these that we are assembled today, and to have them, if possible, forever erased from our statute books, deeming them a shame and a disgrace to a Christian republic in the nineteenth century. We have met to uplift woman's fallen divinity upon an even pedestal with man's.

And, strange as it may seem to many, we now demand our right to vote according to the declaration of the government under which we live. This right no one pretends to deny. We need not prove ourselves equal to Daniel Webster to enjoy this privilege, for the ignorant Irishman in the ditch has all the civil rights he has. We need not prove our muscular power equal to this same Irishman to enjoy this privilege, for the most tiny, weak, ill-shaped stripling of twenty-one has all the civil rights of the Irishman. We have no objection to discuss the question of equality, for we feel that the weight of argument lies wholly with us, but we wish the question of equality kept distinct from the question of rights, for the proof of the one does not determine the truth of the other. All white men in this country have the same rights, however they may differ in mind, body, or estate.

The right is ours. The question now is: how shall we get possession of what rightfully belongs to us? We should not feel so sorely grieved if no man who had not attained the full stature of a Webster, Clay, Van Buren, or Gerrit Smith could claim the right of the elective franchise. But to have drunkards, idiots, horse-racing, rum-selling rowdies, ignorant foreigners, and silly boys fully recognized, while we ourselves are thrust out from all the rights that belong to citizens, it is too grossly insulting to the dignity of woman to be longer quietly submitted to. The right is ours. Have it, we must. Use it, we will. The pens, the tongues, the fortunes, the indomitable wills of many women are already pledged to secure this right. The great truth that no just government can be formed without the consent of the governed we shall echo and re-echo in the ears of the unjust judge, until by continual coming we shall weary him. . . .

The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation, because in the degradation of woman the very fountains of life are poisoned at their source. It is vain to look for silver and gold from mines of copper and lead. It is the wise mother that has the wise son. So long as your women are slaves you may throw your colleges and churches to the winds. You can't have scholars and saints so long as your mothers are ground to powder between the upper and nether millstone of tyranny and lust. How seldom, now, is a father's pride gratified, his fond hopes realized, in the budding genius of his son! The wife is degraded, made the mere creature of caprice, and the foolish son is heaviness to his heart. Truly are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation. God, in His wisdom, has so linked the whole human family together that any violence done at one end of the chain is felt throughout its length, and here, too, is the law of restoration, as in woman all have fallen, so in her elevation shall the race be recreated. . . .

## DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, 1848

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled. The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead. He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

SOURCE: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Cage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1 (1881, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 70-72.



He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband.

In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women—the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known. He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church, as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

## RESOLUTIONS

WHEREAS, The great precept of nature is conceded to be, that "man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness." Blackstone in his Commentaries remarks, that this law of Nature being coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries and at all times; no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this, and such of them as are valid, derive all their force, and all their validity, and all their authority, mediately and immediately, from this original; therefore,

Resolved, That such laws as conflict, in any way with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great precept of nature and of no validity, for this is "superior in obligation to any other."

Resolved, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.

Resolved, That woman is man's equal—was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.

Resolved, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.

Resolved, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak and teach, as she has an opportunity, in all religious assemblies.

Resolved, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy, and refinement of behavior that is required of woman in the social state, should also be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman.

Resolved, That the objection of indelicacy and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill-grace from those who encourage, by their attendance, her appearance on the stage, in the concert. Or in feats of the circus.

Resolved, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her.

Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.

Resolved, That the equality of human rights results necessarily from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities.

Resolved, therefore, That, being invested by the creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is



demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking, by any instrumentalities proper to be used, and in any assemblies proper to be held; and this being a self-evident truth growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature, any custom or authority adverse to it, whether modern or wearing the hoary sanction of antiquity, is to be regarded as a self-evident falsehood, and at war with mankind.

Resolved, That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to women an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce.

## Sojourner Truth (c. 1797-1883)

*Isabella Baumfree is a legendary figure in American history. After escaping from slavery, she dedicated herself equally to the causes of abolition and feminism. Proclaiming that she would travel the nation speaking nothing but the truth, she changed her name to Sojourner Truth. Uneducated and untrained in grammatical niceties, she was nevertheless an extraordinary speaker who invariably mesmerized audiences wherever she went. Her most famous speech was given at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. There is some dispute about her exact words because the written version (transcribed some 12 years after the event by Frances Gage, the president of the convention) differs from a contemporary newspaper account of the speech. In any case, the speech enthralled her audience and still resonates today as a compelling example of nineteenth-century feminism.*

## Ain't I A Woman?, 1851

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere.

SOURCE: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda J. Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (Rochester: Rochester Mann, 1881), vol. 1, 403-404.

Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [a member of the audience calls out, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him. If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

## Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)

*Frederick Douglass was perhaps the most articulate and influential black abolitionist during the antebellum period. After his escape from slavery in 1838, he surfaced in Massachusetts, where he met William Lloyd Garrison. Soon thereafter he became an ardent and tireless campaigner for abolition. The story is often repeated of Garrison introducing Douglass as a speaker at a Nantucket antislavery meeting in 1841. When Douglass spoke, he eloquently confessed that he was a "thief," for he had stolen his limbs, his head, and his body from his master by running away. He gave speeches around the country and in England, he wrote an autobiography, and he published an abolitionist newspaper, The North Star. Not only was Frederick Douglass committed to the campaign against slavery but also he fought for complete civil and political rights for African Americans and allied himself to the women's rights movement.*

*Shortly after the Seneca Falls convention, he reported on the event in The North Star (see the full edition of Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation). Perhaps Frederick Douglass's most powerful (and acerbic) speech is the one he delivered at the 1852 Fourth of July celebration in Rochester, New York.*



## WHAT TO THE SLAVE IS THE FOURTH OF JULY?, JULY 5, 1852

... What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is wrong? No! I will not. I have better employment for my time and strength than such arguments would imply.

What, then, remains to be argued? Is it that slavery is not divine; that God did not establish it; that our doctors of divinity are mistaken? There is blasphemy in the thought. That which is inhuman, cannot be divine! Who can reason on such a proposition? They that can, may; I cannot. The time for such argument is passed.

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could reach the nation's ear, I would, to-day, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour.

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival....

SOURCE: John W. Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, 1847-1854* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), vol. 2, 386-387.

## Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

When hostilities with Mexico broke out in 1846, there was little doubt in anyone's mind that the war was going to be a war for expansion. Many Northerners were aware that the South had set its sights on the northern provinces of Mexico as suitable territory into which slavery could be expanded and out of which new slave states could be carved. But, on the whole, there was widespread enthusiasm and patriotic fervor in favor of war. Two hundred thousand men volunteered for the army, while politicians and newspapers claimed that the war would be a blessing for Mexico by bestowing the American benefits of liberty and equality.

Abolitionists and some clergymen and politicians, however, raised their voices in opposition to a war that would expand slavery. William Lloyd Garrison staunchly condemned the war. So, too, did Theodore Parker, Henry Clay, and David Wilnot. A little-known one-term congressman from Illinois, responding to President Polk's statement that "American blood had been spilled on American soil," introduced the "Spot Resolution" to Congress, which demanded that the president reveal the exact spot on which American blood had been spilled. Abraham Lincoln's resolution, however, was defeated, and war was declared. Eventually, enthusiasm for the war began to wane, especially after reports out of Mexico revealed that tens of thousands of American soldiers were dying of dysentery and other diseases, hundreds were deserting, and atrocities were being perpetrated against the civilian population.

The most famous dissenter against the Mexican War was Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau, like his close friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, was a transcendentalist. In the summer of 1846, Thoreau was in the midst of his experiment in living life simply and deliberately at Walden Pond. He believed that most men were living lives of "quiet desperation" because they were unable to connect with their own spirits. "However mean your life is," Thoreau wrote, "meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names." In July 1846, after refusing to pay his poll tax because he refused to support a government that was undertaking a war to expand slavery, Thoreau was arrested and put in jail. Though he spent only one night in the cell (against his wishes, his aunt paid the tax for him), the experience led him to write one of the most influential essays in American literature. In "On Resistance to Civil Government" (also referred to as "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience"), Thoreau argued that when there is injustice, it is the duty of every just man to oppose that injustice. If a law is unjust—as any law supporting the institution of slavery was—then it is the duty of every just person to break that law and pay the consequences. In this way, enough pressure would be put on the government so that the authorities would have no recourse but to change the law. The story (perhaps



apocryphal) has been told that Emerson, scandalized that his friend had been locked up, visited Thoreau that night and asked, "Henry, what are you doing in there?" Thoreau, looking back through the bars, without hesitation replied, "Ralph, what are you doing out there!"

"Civil Disobedience" (for the complete text see the full edition of *Dissent in America: The Voices That Shaped a Nation*) would go on to have a far wider impact than Thoreau himself could have foreseen. Later in the century a young law student in London read it and spent the rest of his life using Thoreau's principles to fight apartheid in South Africa and British imperialism in his native India. This, of course, was Mohandas K. Gandhi. In the 1940s, a young theology student at Morehouse College who had been following Gandhi's career also fell under the spell of "Civil Disobedience" and put its ideas to the test after he became a minister in Montgomery, Alabama, and led the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955. Eight years later, in 1963, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in which he, too, echoing Thoreau, made a distinction between just laws and unjust laws.

Though Thoreau pointed out repeatedly that individuals must strive for self-realization, he did not lose sight of the fact that individuals must operate within society and that they have an obligation to do what is right. "I learned this, at least, by my experiment," Thoreau wrote at the end of *Walden*, "that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."

## "ON RESISTANCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT," 1849

I heartily accept the motto, "That government is best which governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe—"That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.

SOURCE: Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, ed. by William Rossi (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 226–245.

This American government—what is it but a tradition, though a recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity, but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend it to his will. It is a sort of wooden gun to the people themselves. But it is not the less necessary for this; for the people must have some complicated machinery or other, and hear its din, to satisfy that idea of government which they have. Governments show thus how successfully men can be imposed upon, even impose on themselves, for their own advantage. It is excellent, we must all allow. Yet this government never of itself furthered any enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way. It does not keep the country free. It does not settle the West. It does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way. For government is an expedient, by which men would fain succeed in letting one another alone; and, as has been said, when it is most expedient, the governed are most let alone by it. . . .

But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it.

After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest. But a government in which the majority rule in all cases can not be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in which the majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?—in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right. It is truly enough said that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. A common and natural result of an undue respect for the law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. Now, what are they? Men at all? or small movable forts and magazines, at the service of some unscrupulous man in power? Visit the Navy Yard, and behold a marine, such a man as an American government can make, or such as



it can make a man with its black arts—a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity, a man laid out alive and standing, and already, as one may say, buried under arms with funeral accompaniment....

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others—as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders—serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without intending it, as God. A very few—as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men—serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it. A wise man will only be useful as a man, and will not submit to be “clay,” and “stop a hole to keep the wind away,” but leave that office to his dust....

He who gives himself entirely to his fellow men appears to them useless and selfish; but he who gives himself partially to them is pronounced a benefactor and philanthropist.

How does it become a man to behave toward the American government today? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's government also.

All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable. But almost all say that such is not the case now. But such was the case, they think, in the Revolution of '75. If one were to tell me that this was a bad government because it taxed certain foreign commodities brought to its ports, it is most probable that I should not make an ado about it, for I can do without them. All machines have their friction; and possibly this does enough good to counter-balance the evil. At any rate, it is a great evil to make a stir about it. But when the friction comes to have its machine, and oppression and robbery are organized, I say, let us not have such a machine any longer. In other words, when a sixth of the population of a nation which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this duty the more urgent is the fact that the country so overrun is not our own, but ours is the invading army.

Paley, a common authority with many on moral questions, in his chapter on the “Duty of Submission to Civil Government,” resolves all civil obligation into expediency; and he proceeds to say that “so long as the interest of the whole

society requires it, that is, so long as the established government cannot be resisted or changed without public inconvenience; it is the will of God . . . that the established government be obeyed—and no longer. This principle being admitted, the justice of every particular case of resistance is reduced to a computation of the quantity of the danger and grievance on the one side, and of the probability and expense of redressing it on the other.” Of this, he says, every man shall judge for himself. But Paley appears never to have contemplated those cases to which the rule of expediency does not apply, in which a people, as well as an individual, must do justice, cost what it may. If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself. This, according to Paley, would be inconvenient. But he that would save his life, in such a case, shall lose it. This people must cease to hold slaves, and to make war on Mexico, though it cost them their existence as a people.

In their practice, nations agree with Paley; but does anyone think that Massachusetts does exactly what is right at the present crisis? . . .

Practically speaking, the opponents to a reform in Massachusetts are not a hundred thousand politicians at the South, but a hundred thousand merchants and farmers here, who are more interested in commerce and agriculture than they are in humanity, and are not prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico, cost what it may. I quarrel not with far-off foes, but with those who, near at home, co-operate with, and do the bidding of, those far away, and without whom the latter would be harmless. We are accustomed to say, that the mass of men are unprepared; but improvement is slow, because the few are not as materially wiser or better than the many. It is not so important that many should be good as you, as that there be some absolute goodness somewhere; for that will leaven the whole lump. There are thousands who are in opinion opposed to slavery and to the war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them; who, esteeming themselves children of Washington and Franklin, sit down with their hands in their pockets, and say that they know not what to do, and do nothing; who even postpone the question of freedom to the question of free trade, and quietly read the prices-current along with the latest advices from Mexico, after dinner, and, it may be, fall asleep over them both. What is the price-current of an honest man and patriot today? They hesitate, and they regret, and sometimes they petition; but they do nothing in earnest and with effect. They will wait, well disposed, for others to remedy the evil, that they may no longer have it to regret. At most, they give up only a cheap vote, and a feeble countenance and Godspeed, to the right, as it goes by them. There are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of virtue to one virtuous man. But it is easier to deal with the real possessor of a thing than with the temporary guardian of it.

All voting is a sort of gaming, like checkers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong, with moral questions; and betting naturally accompanies it. The character of the voters is not staked. I cast my vote, perchance, as I think right; but I am not vitally concerned that that right should prevail. I am willing to leave it to the majority. Its obligation, therefore, never exceeds that of expediency. Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it.



It is only expressing to men feebly your desire that it should prevail. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men. When the majority shall at length vote for the abolition of slavery, it will be because they are indifferent to slavery, or because there is but little slavery left to be abolished by their vote. They will then be the only slaves. Only his vote can hasten the abolition of slavery who asserts his own freedom by his vote.

I hear of a convention to be held at Baltimore, or elsewhere, for the selection of a candidate for the Presidency, made up chiefly of editors, and men who are politicians by profession; but I think, what is it to any independent, intelligent, and respectable man what decision they may come to? Shall we not have the advantage of this wisdom and honesty, nevertheless? Can we not count upon some independent votes? Are there not many individuals in the country who do not attend conventions? But no: I find that the respectable man, so called, has immediately drifted from his position, and despairs of his country, when his country has more reasons to despair of him. He forthwith adopts one of the candidates thus selected as the only available one, thus proving that he is himself available for any purposes of the demagogue. His vote is of no more worth than that of any unprincipled foreigner or hireling native, who may have been bought. O for a man who is a man, and, as my neighbor says, has a bone in his back which you cannot pass your hand through! Our statistics are at fault: the population has been returned too large. How many men are there to a square thousand miles in the country? Hardly one. Does not America offer any inducement for men to settle here? The American has dwindled into an Odd Fellow—one who may be known by the development of his organ of gregariousness, and a manifest lack of intellect and cheerful self-reliance; whose first and chief concern, on coming into the world, is to see that the almshouses are in good repair; and, before yet he has lawfully donned the virile garter, to collect a fund to the support of the widows and orphans that may be; who, in short, ventures to live only by the aid of the Mutual Insurance company, which has promised to bury him decently.

It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even to most enormous, wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too. See what gross inconsistency is tolerated. I have heard some of my townsmen say, "I should like to have them order me out to help put down an insurrection of the slaves, or to march to Mexico—see if I would go"; and yet these very men have each, directly by their allegiance, and so indirectly, at least, by their money, furnished a substitute. The soldier is applauded who refuses to serve in an unjust war by those who do not refuse to sustain the unjust government which makes the war; is applauded by those whose own act and authority he disregards and sets at naught; as if the state were penitent to that degree that it hired one to scourge it while it sinned, but not to that degree that it left off sinning

for a moment. Thus, under the name of Order and Civil Government, we are all made at last to pay homage to and support our own meanness. After the first blush of sin comes its indifference; and from immoral it becomes, as it were, unmoral, and not quite unnecessary to that life which we have made. . . .

How can a man be satisfied to entertain an opinion merely, and enjoy it? Is there any enjoyment in it, if his opinion is that he is aggrieved? If you are cheated out of a single dollar by your neighbor, you do not rest satisfied with knowing you are cheated, or with saying that you are cheated, or even with petitioning him to pay you your due; but you take effectual steps at once to obtain the full amount, and see to it that you are never cheated again. Action from principle, the perception and the performance of right, changes things and relations; it is essentially revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was. It not only divided States and churches, it divides families; ay, it divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the divine.

Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? . . .

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth—certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter-friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.

As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad. A man has not everything to do, but something; and because he cannot do everything, it is not necessary that he should be petitioning the Governor or the Legislature any more than it is theirs to petition me; and if they should not hear my petition, what should I do then? But in this case the State has provided no way: its very Constitution is the evil. This may seem to be harsh and stubborn and uncivil; but it is to treat with the utmost kindness and consideration the only spirit that can appreciate or deserves it. So is all change for the better, like birth and death, which convulse the body.

I do not hesitate to say, that those who call themselves Abolitionists should at once effectually withdraw their support, both in person and property, from the government of Massachusetts, and not wait till they constitute a majority of one, before they suffer the right to prevail through them. I think that it is enough if they have God on their side, without waiting for that other one. Moreover, any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already.

I meet this American government, or its representative, the State government, directly, and face to face, once a year—no more—in the person of its



tax-gatherer; this is the only mode in which a man situated as I am necessarily meets it; and it then says distinctly, Recognize me; and the simplest, the most effectual, and, in the present posture of affairs, the indispensablest mode of treating with it on this head, of expressing your little satisfaction with and love for it, is to deny it then. My civil neighbor, the tax-gatherer, is the very man I have to deal with—for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment that I quarrel—and he has voluntarily chosen to be an agent of the government. How shall he ever know well that he is and does as an officer of the government, or as a man, until he is obliged to consider whether he will treat me, his neighbor, for whom he has respect, as a neighbor and well-disposed man, or as a maniac and disturber of the peace, and see if he can get over this obstruction to his neighborliness without a ruder and more impetuous thought or speech corresponding with his action. I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name—if ten honest men only—ay, if one HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, ceasing to hold slaves, were actually to withdraw from this co-partnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefore, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. But we love better to talk about it: that we say is our mission. Reform keeps many scores of newspapers in its service, but not one man....

Under a government which imprisons unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place today, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less despondent spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race should find them; on that separate but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not with her, but against her—the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. If any think that their influence would be lost there, and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, that they would not be as an enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person. Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office." When the subject has refused

allegiance, and the officer has resigned from office, then the revolution is accomplished....

Some years ago, the State met me in behalf of the Church, and commanded me to pay a certain sum toward the support of a clergyman whose preaching my father attended, but never I myself. "Pay," it said, "or be locked up in the jail." I declined to pay. But, unfortunately, another man saw fit to pay it. I did not see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster; for I was not the State's schoolmaster, but I supported myself by voluntary subscription. I did not see why the lyceum should not present its tax bill, and have the State to back its demand, as well as the Church. However, as the request of the selectmen, I condescended to make some such statement as this in writing: "Know all men by these presents, that I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any society which I have not joined." This I gave to the town clerk; and he has it. The State, having thus learned that I did not wish to be regarded as a member of that church, has never made a like demand on me since; though it said that it must adhere to its original presumption that time. If I had known how to name them, I should then have signed off in detail from all the societies which I never signed on to; but I did not know where to find such a complete list.

I have paid no poll tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded at length that this was the best use it could put me to, and had never thought to avail itself of my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know how to treat me, but behaved like persons who are underbred. In every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder; for they thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditations, which followed them out again without let or hindrance, and they were really all that was dangerous. As they could not reach me, they had resolved to punish my body; just as boys, if they cannot come at some person against whom they have a spite, will abuse his dog. I saw that the State was half-witted, that it was timid as a lone woman with her silver spoons, and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and I lost all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it.

Thus the state never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest....



When I came out of prison—for some one interfered, and paid that tax—I did not perceive that great changes had taken place on the common, such as he observed who went in a youth and emerged a gray-headed man; and yet a change had come to my eyes come over the scene—the town, and State, and country, greater than any that mere time could effect. I saw yet more distinctly the State in which I lived. I saw to what extent the people among whom I lived could be trusted as good neighbors and friends; that their friendship was for summer weather only; that they did not greatly propose to do right; that they were a distinct race from me by their prejudices and superstitions, as the Chinamen and Malays are that in their sacrifices to humanity they ran no risks, not even to their property; that after all they were not so noble but they treated the thief as he had treated them, and hoped, by a certain outward observance and a few prayers, and by walking in a particular straight though useless path from time to time, to save their souls. This may be to judge my neighbors harshly; for I believe that many of them are not aware that they have such an institution as the jail in their village.

It was formerly the custom in our village, when a poor debtor came out of jail, for his acquaintances to salute him, looking through their fingers, which were crossed to represent the jail window, "How do ye do?" My neighbors did not thus salute me, but first looked at me, and then at one another, as if I had returned from a long journey. I was put into jail as I was going to the shoemaker's to get a shoe which was mended. When I was let out the next morning, I proceeded to finish my errand, and, having put on my mended shoe, joined a huckleberry party, who were impatient to put themselves under my conduct; and in half an hour—for the horse was soon tackled—was in the midst of a huckleberry field, on one of our highest hills, two miles off, and then the State was nowhere to be seen.

This is the whole history of "My Prisons."

I have never declined paying the highway tax, because I am as desirous of being a good neighbor as I am of being a bad subject; and as for supporting schools, I am doing my part to educate my fellow countrymen now. It is for no particular item in the tax bill that I refuse to pay it. I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually. I do not care to trace the course of my dollar, if I could, till it buys a man a musket to shoot one with—the dollar is innocent—but I am concerned to trace the effects of my allegiance. In fact, I quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion, though I will still make use and get what advantages of her I can, as is usual in such cases.

If others pay the tax which is demanded of me, from a sympathy with the State, they do but what they have already done in their own case, or rather they abet injustice to a greater extent than the State requires. If they pay the tax from a mistaken interest in the individual taxed, to save his property, or prevent his going to jail, it is because they have not considered wisely how far they let their private feelings interfere with the public good....

No man with a genius for legislation has appeared in America. They are rare in the history of the world. There are orators, politicians, and eloquent men, by the thousand; but the speaker has not yet opened his mouth to speak who is

capable of settling the much-vexed questions of the day. We love eloquence for its own sake, and not for any truth which it may utter, or any heroism it may inspire. Our legislators have not yet learned the comparative value of free trade and of freedom, of union, and of rectitude, to a nation. They have no genius or talent for comparatively humble questions of taxation and finance, commerce and manufactures and agriculture. If we were left solely to the wordy wit of legislators in Congress for our guidance, uncorrected by the seasonable experience and the effectual complaints of the people, America would not long retain her rank among the nations. For eighteen hundred years, though perchance I have no right to say it, the New Testament has been written; yet where is the legislator who has wisdom and practical talent enough to avail himself of the light which it sheds on the science of legislation.

The authority of government, even such as I am willing to submit to—for I will cheerfully obey those who know and can do better than I, and in many things even those who neither know nor can do so well—is still an impure one: to be strictly just, it must have the sanction and consent of the governed. It can have no pure right over my person and property but what I concede to it. The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual. Even the Chinese philosopher was wise enough to regard the individual as the basis of the empire. Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow men. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which I have also imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.

## Lucy Stone (1818-1893)

*A graduate of Oberlin College, Lucy Stone spent most of her life as an influential abolitionist and feminist. When she married Henry B. Blackwell in 1855, she not only kept her maiden name but also used the marriage ceremony to issue a protest statement in which she (and her husband) deplored the subjugation of women.*



## STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE, 1855

While acknowledging our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relationship of husband and wife, yet in justice to ourselves and a great principle, we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no sanction of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to such of the present laws of marriage, as refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority, investing him with legal powers which no honorable man would exercise, and which no man should possess. We protest especially against the laws which give to the husband:

1. The custody of the wife's person.
2. The exclusive control and guardianship of their children.
3. The sole ownership of her personal, and use of her real estate, unless previously settled upon her, or placed in the hands of trustees, as in the case of minors, lunatics, and idiots.
4. The absolute right to the product of her industry.
5. Also against laws which give to the widower so much larger and more permanent interest in the property of his deceased wife, than they give to the widow in that of the deceased husband.
6. Finally, against the whole system by which "the legal existence of the wife is suspended during marriage," so that in most States, she neither has a legal part in the choice of her residence, nor can she make a will, nor sue or be sued in her own name, nor inherit property.

We believe that personal independence and equal human rights can never be forfeited, except for crime; that marriage should be an equal and permanent partnership, and so recognized by law; that until it is so recognized, married partners should provide against the radical injustice of present laws, by every means in their power.

We believe that where domestic difficulties arise, no appeal should be made to legal tribunals under existing laws, but that all difficulties should be submitted to the equitable adjustment of arbitrators mutually chosen.

Thus reverencing law, we enter our protest against rules and customs which are unworthy of the name, since they violate justice, the essence of law.

[Signed]

Henry B. Blackwell

Lucy Stone

SOURCE: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 1, (1881; New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 260-261.

## The Know-Nothings

As the issue of slavery was rapidly consuming party politics during the 1840s and 1850s, a growing number of people began to believe that the real threat to the United States was not slavery but immigration, especially the immigration of Roman Catholics from Ireland and Germany. Believing that the United States would be undermined by the influx of these immigrants, who would presumably put their loyalty to the pope over the Constitution, old-stock Americans began to espouse nativism and joined various secret anti-foreigner organizations.

Eventually, these nativist groups formed the American Party to keep "America for Americans" and to ensure that Protestantism remained the dominant religion. Popularly called the Know-Nothings (because they usually responded, "I know nothing" when outsiders questioned them about the party), they met in Philadelphia in 1856, drew up a platform, and nominated former president Millard Fillmore as their candidate. The party received 21 percent of the popular vote in the election, but by the election of 1860, the slavery issue so dominated the nation that the Know-Nothings' political influence had dissipated.

## AMERICAN PARTY PLATFORM, PHILADELPHIA, FEBRUARY 21, 1856

1. An humble acknowledgement to the Supreme Being, for his protecting care vouchsafed to our fathers in their successful Revolutionary struggle, and hitherto manifested to us, their descendants, in the preservation of the liberties, the independence and the union of these States.
2. The perpetuation of the Federal Union and Constitution, as the palladium of our civil and religious liberties, and the only sure bulwarks of American Independence.
3. *Americans must rule America*, and to this end *native-born* citizens should be selected for all State, Federal, and municipal offices of government employment, in preference to all others. *Nevertheless*,
4. Persons born of American parents residing temporarily abroad, should be entitled to all the rights of native-born citizens.
5. No person should be selected for political station (whether of native or foreign birth), who recognizes any allegiance or obligation of any description to any foreign prince, potentate or power, or who refuses to recognize the Federal

SOURCE: Thomas V. Cooper and Hector T. Fenton, *American Politics from the Beginning to Date* (Chicago: Charles R. Brodix, 1882), 35-36.



and State Constitution (each within its sphere) as paramount to all other laws, as rules of political action.

6. The unequalled recognition and maintenance of the reserved rights of the several States, and the cultivation of harmony and fraternal good will between the citizens of the several States, and to this end, non-interference by Congress with questions appertaining solely to the individual States, and non-intervention by each State with the affairs of any other State.

7. The recognition of the right of native-born and naturalized citizens of the United States, permanently residing in any Territory thereof, to frame their constitution and laws, and to regulate their domestic and social affairs in their own mode, subject only to the provisions of the Federal Constitution, with the privilege of admission into the Union whenever they have the requisite population for one Representative in Congress: *Provided, always*, that none but those who are citizens of the United States, under the Constitution and laws thereof, and who have a fixed residence in any such territory, ought to participate in the formation of the Constitution, or in the enactment of laws for said Territory or State.

8. An enforcement of the principles that no State or Territory ought to admit others than citizens to the right of suffrage, or of holding political offices of the United States.

9. A change in the laws of naturalization, making a continued residence of twenty-one years, of all not heretofore provided for, an indispensable requisite for citizenship hereafter, and excluding all paupers, and persons convicted of crime, from landing upon our shores; but no interference with the vested rights of foreigners.

10. Opposition to any union between Church and State; no interference with religious faith or worship, and no test oaths for office.

11. Free and thorough investigation into any and all alleged abuses of public functionaries, and a strict economy in public expenditures.

12. The maintenance and enforcement of all laws constitutionally enacted until said laws shall be repealed, or shall be declared null and void by competent judicial authority.

13. Opposition to the reckless and unwise policy of the present Administration in the general management of our national affairs, and more especially as shown in removing "Americans" (by designation) and Conservatives in principle, from office, and placing foreigners and Ultraists in their places; as shown in a truckling subserviency to the stronger, and an insolent and cowardly bravado towards the weaker powers; as shown in re-opening sectional agitation; by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise; as shown in granting to unnaturalized foreigners the right of suffrage in Kansas and Nebraska question; as shown in the corruptions which pervade some of the Departments of the Government; as shown in disgracing meritorious naval officers through prejudice or caprice; and as shown in the blundering mismanagement of our foreign relations.

14. Therefore, to remedy existing evils, and prevent the disastrous consequences otherwise resulting therefrom, we would build up the "American Party" upon the principles hereinbefore stated.

15. That each State Council shall have authority to amend their several Constitutions, so as to abolish the several degrees and substitute a pledge of honor, instead of other obligations, for fellowship and admission into the party.

16. A free and open discussion of all political principles embraced in our platform.

## John Brown (1800-1859)

One of the most famous and controversial figures in American history is the radical abolitionist John Brown. As with William Lloyd Garrison, there was very little "give" in John Brown. He held to his beliefs with a passion bordering on fanaticism. However, Brown was willing to go much further than Garrison, who had always held pacifist views. In 1856, he murdered five proslavery settlers in Pottawatomie, Kansas, by hacking them to death, thus plunging Bleeding Kansas into a guerrilla war that did not let up for more than a decade. On October 16, 1859, he led a band of 21 men (16 whites, 5 blacks) into Harpers Ferry, Virginia, where he hoped to seize the federal armory there. He intended to arm slaves and lead them into the Shenandoah Valley, where he believed other slaves would rally to the cause of armed insurrection. But the strategy failed. Enraged townspeople besieged Brown until several companies of U.S. marines and cavalry (one company under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee) arrived. On October 18, Lee issued a demand for Brown to surrender. Brown rejected the offer, and in the ensuing shoot-out, 12 of Brown's men were killed and Brown himself severely wounded, was captured. The event was regarded then—and is still so regarded by historians—as the final straw leading to the Civil War. To Northerners, the martyred Brown was a great hero. To Southerners, he was the devil incarnate, who would instigate the slaves to rise up and cut their masters' throats. The Southerners' conviction that Brown was representative of all Northerners led many slave states over the next several months to expand their state militias.

At his trial, Brown acknowledged that he was guilty of trying to free the slaves but not that he was guilty of a crime and that if he had "interfered on behalf of the rich" instead of the slaves, he would not have been brought to trial. He was found guilty of treason, and on December 2, 1859, he was hanged. He handed a note to a soldier as he mounted the scaffold: "I, John Brown am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with Blood. I had, as I now think vainly, flattered myself that without very much bloodshed, it might be done."



## ADDRESS TO THE VIRGINIA COURT AT CHARLES TOWN, VIRGINIA, NOVEMBER 2, 1859

I have, may it please the court, a few words to say.

In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted,—the design on my part to free slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clean thing of that matter, as I did last winter, when I went into Missouri and took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moved them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to do the same thing again, on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.

I have another objection; and that is, it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit, and which I admit has been fairly proved (for I admire the truthfulness and candor of the greater portion of the witnesses who have testified in this case),—had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends—either father, mother, sister, wife, or children, or any of that class—and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right; and every man in this court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment.

The court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or at least the New Testament. That teaches me that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them. It teaches me further to “remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.” I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, I am too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done—as I have always freely admitted I have done—in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right. Now if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments,—I submit; so let it be done!

Let me say one word further.

I feel entirely satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances, it has been more generous than I expected. I feel no consciousness of my guilt. I have stated from the first what was my intention, and what was not. I never had any design against the life of any person, nor any disposition to commit treason, or excite slaves to rebel, or make any general insurrection. I never encouraged any man to do so, but always discouraged any idea of any kind.

Let me say also, a word in regard to the statements made by some to those connected with me. I hear it has been said by some of them that I have induced them to join me. But the contrary is true. I do not say this to injure them, but as regretting their weakness. There is not one of them but joined me of his own accord, and the greater part of them at their own expense. A number of them I never saw, and never had a word of conversation with, till the day they came to me; and that was for the purpose I have stated.

Now I have done.