

William Lloyd Garrison

Abolitionist Faction

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Member and leader Abolitionist Faction.

You are **William Lloyd Garrison** (born 1805). Raised in poverty, in Newburyport, Massachusetts, you have earned fame as an advocate of immediate abolition. You denounced all compromises with slavery as evil sins inseparable from the institution's own sinfulness. This is because slavery has survived only with the toleration of non-slaveowners, who have been corrupted by the powers of the slaveholders. You also denounced the falsehood of all ideas of racial subordination and white supremacy: Negroes are inferior, you argued, only because they are oppressed. The first edition of your newspaper *The Liberator* was published on January 1, 1831, and you are still publishing it today, in 1845.

You have a zealous approach that has produced a serious and passionate movement in favor of immediate abolition, but your zeal sometimes annoys sympathizers. There have been schisms within the ranks of the abolitionists, and many blame you for these splits. But your critics don't understand that your views are correct, and you rarely hesitate to show them (in print and in public) the errors of their ways. You regard yourself as the founder of Abolitionism, and you feel confident that your views are correct and should be followed.

You are rightfully credited with doing much to make slavery into a controversial political and moral issue in the 1830s. That's beyond dispute. Not everyone recognizes just how great an accomplishment that is! Without slavery being controversial there was little hope of ending this great evil. You can put right anyone who does not see the true light, and your goal is the advancement of human freedom, not self-aggrandizement. You care not for personal fame, you say, and you believe it.

You, like all Abolitionists, seek to free all enslaved people from slavery, and you aim to do so by persuading the slaveholders and their sympathizers that slavery is a great wrong, that must be ended immediately. This moral suasion approach has, you admit, gained fewer converts than you at first expected it to when you started *The Liberator* in 1831. But you still believe in moral suasion.

You are noted for an acerbic tongue and a caustic pen. You are entirely non-violent in terms of physical confrontation, but in a battle of wits and logic you are a tough foe to tangle with. In 1836, the Rev. Lyman Beecher, one of the country's most influential clergymen, upheld strict observance of the Sabbath as an obligation for all Christians, while

also seeking to bar abolitionist speakers from the pulpits of Congregational churches. He also urged the Presbyterian General Assembly to avoid any discussion of slavery whatsoever. At this time, the abolitionists were focusing much effort on converting Northern Protestants to abolitionism, so Beecher's attack was strategic. You, Mr. Garrison, responded with typically sharp words. You said that Beecher "goes with the South" and its churches "clotted with innocent blood." You denounced Beecher for ignoring the slaveholders' disregard not merely of the Sabbath command for their slaves "the fourth commandment, but the WHOLE DECALOGUE!" – which you claim the slaveholders violate in how they treat slaves.¹ Only a church that severed its ties with "traffickers in souls" could, as your biographer Henry Mayer will later express your views, "recover its gospel purity" (p. 226). While Beecher had the power of institutions and social custom behind him, neither he nor any other of your opponents could out-power your rhetoric or reasoning. You should bring that powerful moral voice to these three Meetings in New York.

Your religious views have evolved a great deal, so that by today, you are a follower of what you call "primitive Christianity" and unconnected to any organized church. You tend toward the Hicksite perspective within the Society of Friends, which holds that the individual conscience, not formal rules or creed of an organized body, was the surest path to truth and justice. You note that at one time, Massachusetts had "lawfully hung Quakers, wizards, and witches," just as southern states now lawfully trade in human property and permit torture of enslaved people (Mayer p. 224). So, you uphold the idea of a "Higher Law" that must be followed – God's law of justice, higher than any law of man protecting evil. That higher law idea is of course most unsettling to those who control the administration of laws in the present.

You are a printer by trade, entirely self-educated, a loyal husband, and loving father to seven children. You adore your children. When Helen, your wife, is especially worried about the family's poor finances, you put your arm around her to say, "My dear, the Lord will provide." You play with your children far more than most men of your era. You refuse to rule over the family like the distant patriarch of so many nineteenth century American families. You do housework and feed the children. When visiting others' homes, you often get down on the floor to play with the children. **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**, recalled you taking off your coat to rock the baby to sleep, letting your wife get some rest when you and a group of abolitionists came home after a convention. Yet of course, you are a man and possess a masculine identity but yours is more the masculinity of "the Christian apostle" than the rugged and tough, patriarchal American man of your century (Mayer, p. 356).

¹ You denounced Beecher for ignoring the slaveholders' disregard not merely of the Sabbath command for their slaves "the fourth commandment, but the WHOLE DECALOGUE!", all the Ten Commandments, which you say slaveholders violate.

And, of course, you are much beloved and admired by thousands of abolitionists, who see you as the guiding light of a movement of epochal significance. By defining slavery as a sin that requires immediate abolition rather than a problem suitable to some political compromise, you brilliantly made slavery into a larger, unavoidable, problem for all Americans. This achievement of yours, as a young man with the first issues of *The Liberator*, was a watershed that opened up possibilities of freedom and emancipation.

You live in Boston, a city with many, many abolitionists, but also with much fiercely racist anti-abolitionist sentiment. You have been nearly killed by violent anti-abolitionist mobs several times, including once in Boston in 1835 when a rope was tied around your body and you were forced to climb a ladder. Members of the mob cried, “lynch him” and nearly did so. The mayor had you arrested on that occasion, for inspiring violence, but all you’d tried to do was to give a speech to a group of women abolitionists who had invited you to talk. The mayor’s hostility to you is shared by much of the wealthy and politically influential upper class in the North. For many gentlemen of wealth and standing, their attitude toward you can be summarized by the gentleman who said to a friend, who mentioned you, “Garrison? He’s the kind of fellow who ought to be hung.”

You could be arrested or murdered on sight should you venture into the South. One southern legislature, **in Georgia**, promised a **\$5,000 reward** to anyone who would deliver you to any court in the state to be tried for **sedition**. That was right after the Nat Turner rebellion, in 1831, for which you were blamed despite your much stated opposition to slaves’ using violence against their masters. In fact, you oppose not only violence in all forms but any type of “coercion.” You believe in moral suasion as the route to emancipation.

By the 1840s, not all abolitionists retain this belief in converting slaveholders as the way to end slavery. Fugitive slaves tended to uphold the right of Black people to use whatever means necessary to secure their freedom. Significantly, much of your strongest support comes from the Black communities of the North. The communities are small and impoverished, are subject to mob violence, and bounty hunter raids. These communities include many people who are “Garrisonians” and they provided the first and most enduring support for *The Liberator*. Few white Americans have as deep a belief as you in racial equality and those that do are all abolitionists, a radical minority.

For these meetings in New York, you must write articles for *The Liberator*, one for each of the first two Meetings, and you must circulate these articles to all participants in these discussions (that is, all in the class), prior to the start of the subsequent evening’s discussion. These articles must reflect a serious and accurate account of the discussions while also displaying your own unmistakable point of view.

Your other major assignment is to prepare a speech that you will deliver in Meeting III, at Broadway Tabernacle. This speech should lay out your whole critique of the Constitution as hopelessly corrupted by slavery, including your advocacy of “disunionism” – the severing of the free states from their union with slave states through the Constitution and the Slave Power controlled United States. (Your critique of the existing Christian churches in America is crucial to your view of the world, but in the meeting at Broadway Tabernacle, everybody needs to focus on the Constitution.)

Never forget the three core principles of abolitionism, which you will never compromise and will never cease to criticize those who do accept compromises:

- **An immediate end to slavery, all of it, everywhere!**
- **No compensation for slaveowners!**
- **Full equality for all people, regardless of color or sex!**

OBJECTIVES

1. *Faction objective*
2. *Individual objective*

Assignments:

1. For the first meeting, write an article for *The Liberator*, and provide copies to the class at the start of the meeting.
2. For the second meeting, write another *Liberator* article, and provide advance copies to the entire class.
3. For the third meeting, prepare and deliver a speech of your critique of slavery in the Constitution, and your disunion solution.

Relationships

With ideas

Your advocacy of disunion with slave states is controversial within the ranks of Reform². So are your criticisms of all Christian churches for being tainted with the sin of slavery. You’ve not yet burned a copy of the U.S. Constitution in public, but you will do so in

² “Reform” here refers to the general community of antebellum Americans who favored reform of one or more aspects of society, and worked for those goals, but did not necessarily agree with each other on how to define the problems needing reform. For instance, abolitionists focused on slavery, while temperance advocates saw alcohol as the most significant problem.

a few years, denouncing the U.S. and its Constitution as a “pact with the Devil”. In 1843, you proclaimed the doctrine that there should be “No Union with Slaveholders”. This demand was not yet become popular, to say the least, among people in the North. Some other abolitionists feel that your disunionism is ill considered, because it alienates potential friends who should be won over to abolitionism by effective, rather than inflammatory, propaganda. You stand by the disunionism on the plain and true grounds that the United States government has and does protect slavery and the Slave Power. As long as the free people of the North and enslavers of the South share a political union, that union will protect slavery. You abhor American nationalism, as it protects the power of the slaveholders.

With texts

With your faction

Within the reformist circles, you do not seek to mandate your full range of beliefs on others, but you do seek to persuade people. Like all the “Garrisonians,” you insist on the right to advocate for one’s beliefs, even if they are unpopular. Free speech is essential to the cause of human rights. You oppose any test of creed, in contrast to the conservative abolitionists who do seek to mandate a test of creed as a way of excluding Garrisonians from the movement. Not all abolitionists agree with you on all points, and that’s fine with you. People have the right to be wrong. You try to listen to their criticisms without responding harshly. The Movement needs all good people, and you embrace all the abolitionists, even those who are mistaken or wrong on various points.

With other characters

Despite the sometimes abrasive qualities of your personality and your rhetoric, you and Mr. Douglass are friends. You’ve encouraged him to become a full time abolitionist. You know his devotion to the cause of freedom and your own are equal, and so far the two of you have had no serious disagreements. Indeed, his *Narrative* includes a brutal attack on American Christianity that reflects your own views, which will later be termed “Garrisonian abolitionism”.

Strategy Advice

Warning to all Abolitionists: There may be plots afoot in New York, a city with a large number of southern-sympathizers and Negro haters. You know it’s a dangerous city. You recall facing a violent mob here, and the city has many rabid anti-abolitionists, ignorant men readily manipulated by the deceitful Slave Power. Because of all this, you must be

careful for the safety of fugitives, while still being boldly outspoken for immediate emancipation!

Intellectual Capital (described in the Gamebook) can help defeat slave-catchers' plots, and so too can better organization. If, during these three meetings, any Black person who is living as a free person at the start of the Game is reduced to enslavement, it will be a most grievous blow to your Cause and to your faction. Reducing a Black person to slavery in this Game 1) is not easy but could be done but 2) cannot be done prior to the start of the 2nd Meeting. **Intellectual Capital**, for individuals and the Faction, and cohesion as a Faction, are the best protections against bounty hunting men-stealers, so acquire **Intellectual Capital** and work effectively with your fellow Abolitionists for the great goal of liberty!

Special Power

To Learn More

The life of William Lloyd Garrison is well studied. One large and readable biography is Henry Mayer's *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), from which many quotations and other details of this character role are drawn.

A shorter, incisive biography is *William Lloyd Garrison and the Challenge of Emancipation*, by James Brewer Stewart (Harlan Davidson, 1992).

<i>SUMMARY OF YOUR INDIVIDUAL VICTORY OBJECTIVES</i>

Papers and Speeches Your instructor, who will indicate the form of assignments (speeches, papers, broadsides, newspaper articles).	• Account of Meeting I (discussion of Frederick Douglass' Narrative) for <i>The Liberator</i> • Account of Meeting II (Calhoun's Banquet) for <i>The Liberator</i> • Speech on the Constitution and Slavery at Meeting III.
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Other responsibilities	• Commission and publish articles for <i>The Liberator</i> by fellow abolitionists and also by Independents • Remain in character • Team work and team strategy • Impromptu speeches, as necessary, to advance your cause
Victory Objectives	• Majority of resolutions passed express anti-slavery sentiments • You have contributed substantially to that victory