

2. Manifesto of the Anti-Slavery Society (1833)

About fifty abolitionist idealists, meeting in Philadelphia, launched the American Anti-Slavery Society with the following declaration. William L. Garrison, who would be its president twenty-two times, was chief architect of this manifesto. Later becoming more insistent and impatient, he denounced the churches as "cages of unclean birds" (because they tolerated slavery), denied the full inspiration of the Bible (because it sanctioned slavery), publicly burned a copy of the Constitution (because it upheld slavery), and as early as 1841 advocated the disruption of the Union (because it legalized slavery). The following is an edict by the American Anti-Slavery Society. Why does it demand immediate and uncompensated emancipation? What concessions does it make at this early date to the South? Which of its proposals were most (and least) politically feasible?

We further maintain that no man has a right to enslave or imbrute his brother—to hold or acknowledge him, for one moment, as a piece of merchandise—to keep back his hire by fraud—or to brutalize his mind by denying him the means of intellectual, social, and moral improvement.

The right to enjoy liberty is inalienable. To invade it is to usurp the prerogative of Jehovah. Every man has a right to his own body—to the products of his own labor—to the protection of law—and to the common advantages of society. It is piracy to buy or steal a native African and subject him to servitude. Surely, the sin is as great to enslave an American as an African.

Therefore we believe and affirm that there is no difference, in principle, between the African slave trade and American slavery;

That every American citizen who retains a human being in involuntary bondage as his property is, according to Scripture (Exodus 21:16), a manstealer;

That the slaves ought instantly to be set free and brought under the protection of law; . . .

That all those laws which are now in force admitting the right of slavery are therefore, before God, utterly null and void. . . .

We further believe and affirm that all persons of color who possess the qualifications which are demanded of others ought to be admitted forthwith to the enjoyment of the same privileges, and the exercise of the same prerogatives, as others; and that the paths of preferment, of wealth, and of intelligence should be opened as widely to them as to persons of a white complexion.

We maintain that no compensation should be given to the planters emancipating their slaves:

Because it would be a surrender of the great fundamental principle that man cannot hold property in man;

Because slavery is a crime, and therefore [the slave] is not an article to be sold;

Because the holders of slaves are not the just proprietors of what they claim; freeing the slave is not depriving them of property, but restoring it to its rightful owner; it is not wronging the master, but righting the slave—restoring him to himself;

Because immediate and general emancipation would only destroy nominal, not real, property; it would not amputate a limb or break a bone of the slaves, but, by infusing motives into their breasts, would make them doubly valuable to the masters as free laborers; and

Because, if compensation is to be given at all, it should be given to the outraged and guiltless slaves, and not to those who have plundered and abused them.

We regard as delusive, cruel, and dangerous any scheme of expatriation [to

a] which pretends to aid, either directly or indirectly, in the emancipation of slaves, or to be a substitute for the immediate and total abolition of slavery.

We fully and unanimously recognize the sovereignty of each state to legislate exclusively on the subject of the slavery which is tolerated within its limits; we concede that Congress, under the present national compact, has no right to interfere with any of the slave states in relation to this momentous subject;

But we maintain that Congress has a right, and is solemnly bound, to suppress the domestic trade between the several states, and to abolish slavery in those portions of our territory which the Constitution has placed under its exclusive jurisdiction [District of Columbia].

²W. P. Garrison and F. J. Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879* (New York: The Century Co., 1885), vol. 1, pp. 410-411.