

LESSON P

THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT

Standards: History Standard Two: Students will gather, examine, and analyze historical data [Analysis].

History Standard Three: Students will interpret historical data.

History Standard Four: Students will develop historical knowledge of major events and phenomena in world, United States, and Delaware history.

Civics Standard Three: Students will understand the responsibilities, rights, and privileges of United States citizens.

Objectives: 1) The students will examine a petition presented by the Quakers to the Delaware General Assembly in 1785 and an anti-slavery broadside published in 1836.

2) The students will compare the effectiveness of the two documents.

3) The students will create their own anti-slavery broadside.

Materials: 1) *Lesson P, Delaware Public Archives, Anti-Slavery Broadside*
2) *Lesson P, Delaware Public Archives, Anti-Slavery Petition, Series Number 1111.2*
3) Large Drawing Paper and Crayons

Procedures: 1) Begin a discussion about the American Revolution concerning the reasons the Americans fought the British. They wanted freedom from the rule of Great Britain. Many people questioned why some Americans fought for freedom and independence when they themselves kept slaves. (See background information) Didn't slaves deserve to be independent and free? Many African-Americans had fought in the Revolution on the American side. After the Revolution, the Abolitionist Movement became extremely active. The goal of this movement was to eliminate slavery. Two religious groups, the Quakers and the Methodists, were particularly active in opposing slavery. Two years after the Revolution ended, a group of Quakers in Delaware sent a petition to the General Assembly of Delaware. What is a petition? (A petition is a formal request that is made to someone in authority.)

2) Pass out the petition and read the first two paragraphs and the last paragraph. Ask the following questions:

- Is this a difficult passage to understand? This is the style of writing people used in the 18th century.
- What message are the Quakers trying to convey to the General Assembly? (They want the General Assembly to abolish slavery). Many members of the General Assembly owned slaves.
- Was the Abolitionist Movement limited to Delaware? (No!)

However, the northern part of the United States was much more active in the movement - why? (Slavery was a larger part of the South's economic system because slaves were needed for farm labor - especially for the labor intensive production of cotton and tobacco.) Southerners wanted to keep their slaves. The northern states were becoming more industrialized and did not have the overwhelming need for slave labor.

3) Separate the class into groups of four. Hand out one copy of the "Slave Market of America" broadside to each group. Give the groups some time to look over the document. Inform the students that this document was published about fifty years after the petition of the Quakers. Slavery was still legal in Delaware and many other states.

4) Instruct the students to find the date of publication, the group that published the document, and the state where the group was located. (This information is found in the lower left part of the document - published in 1836 by the American Anti-Slavery Society. The group was located in New York.) Ask the students if someone can point out New York on a classroom map.

5) Ask: What is the document telling you? (There are 7,000 slaves located in the nation's capital of Washington D.C. The document shows the contradiction of a country that is based on freedom and independence yet holds so many people in slavery.) The broadside quotes several documents that are important to Americans. What are some of these documents and what do they say? (The Bible, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution of the United States. Instruct the students to read the quotes that accompany the document they select.)

6) Ask: Why do you think the group included pictures in the broadside? (Many people in the U.S. at the time could not read but they could

understand the illustrations.)

- 7) Ask the students how the various pictures depict slavery in a negative light. (Various responses - note the whip and chains in the picture captioned "Part of Washington City")
- 8) Ask: Why do you think the American Anti-Slavery Society placed the names of the Congressmen on the Broadside? (The organization wanted people to know if their elected representatives chose not to take any action against slavery. Note that all the Southern Representatives voted not to interfere in the slavery issue in the District of Columbia) If there was an election held tomorrow and you had the right to vote - would you support a Congressman who voted against interfering with the slave trade in the District of Columbia (Washington D.C.)?
- 9) Both the Quaker petition and the broadside are anti-slavery documents. Which one is more effective in presenting its message? (Look for various answers)
- 10) Pass out drawing paper to each group and instruct the students to create their own anti-slavery broadside. Point out how this Broadside successfully combines words and pictures to create a negative view of slavery and how it is so contradictory to the ideals of the American Nation - freedom and independence. The students' broadside should combine words and pictures and include information they believe will make other students feel that slavery is wrong. Allow time for groups to share their posters.
- 11) Conclude the lesson by having students compose a "Dear Teacher" letter. In this short, friendly letter, students will explain which document – the petition or the broadside – they thought was more effective and why.

PETITION TRANSCRIPTION

To the General Assembly of the Delaware State
The Memorial and Address of the People called Quakers Inhabitants of this State
Respectfully Sheweth

That having been long affected with the oppression exercised over the Black People by many Inhabitants of this State as also in other Parts of this Continent, we have been anxiously solicitous for their Relief and with Satisfaction observe that a Sense of the Evil of withholding from them their just and natural Right of personal Freedom hat so far prevailed that the Legislators in several of the United States have interposed their Authority for the abolition of Slavery; Encouraged by which, and a Persuasion, that divers members of your House behold the enslaving our fellow Men to be contrary to every Christian, and moral obligation, we take the Liberty to address you on this very

important subject earnestly desiring, it may claim your most serious disinterested Attention, and that in a legislative capacity you will be pleased to apply a remedy for removing the reproachful Evil.

It is well known that the Africans, many of whom have been inhumanly brought into bondage among us possess a considerable Territory, in which they enjoyed their Freedom, but thro' the Avarice of professed Christians have been encouraged in oppression, and Tyranny one over another; and after being forced from their native Country separated from the nearest Connections in Life, are subjected to a state of abject slavery, and severe distress; many of whom, and their offspring are now groaning under oppressive bondage in this government.

It is also known that many religious Persons among us of different Denominations from a conviction of the abomination and complicated Evil of holding them in slavery have been induced to manumit, and restore them to Liberty, but former Legislators on this Government actuated by mistaken Policy, or other Motives have increased the Difficulty by enhancing the security required to indemnify the Public against the Charge of proving for them in case of their falling into want, which being thought unreasonable is therefore seldom complied with, as healthy Negroes set at liberty in the Prime of Life are mostly subject to immediate taxation, by which contributing to the common charges of the community are they not justly entitled to the common Privileges of other free Men, contrary to which being apprehended for misdemeanors they have been denied on open free Trial, and convicted on unequal Laws, and other Modes prescribed different from what are provided for the common Benefit of other Members of civil Community and the cost arising therefrom, and the Damages adjudged have been considered as Debts against their former Masters, by whom they were emancipated, under the Plea of neglecting to give the Security by Law required; whereby, some who could not consistant with a good conscience detain them in Bondage have become liable to heavy Penalties.

Instances have also occurred of some who have restored their slaves to freedom, unjustly reclaiming and again endeavoring to reduce them to a state of bondage.

We therefore intreat you to take the afflicted case of the oppressed Negroes in this State under your mature consideration and grant them such relief as Justice, Humanity, the common natural Rights of Mankind and above all the precepts, and injunctions of the Christian Religion require desiring your minds may be influenced by divine wisdom for your direction.

We are your respectful Friends.

12Mo27th 1785

BACKGROUND

Although the idea of abolishing slavery had been present in the American colonies since the 17th century, the Abolitionist Movement did not become a significant force in America until the time of the American Revolution. The Quakers were the first group in Delaware that took an active role in abolishing slavery. Through the early to mid-18th century, many Quakers were slaveowners. However, a new generation of Quakers who opposed slavery came into power in the time prior to the American Revolution. Citing the ideas of universal brotherhood and the "golden rule", this reform-minded group leaders continually petitioned the Delaware General Assembly to abolish slavery.

Another anti-slavery religious group beginning to flourish in Delaware were the Methodists. Methodists leaders such as John Wesley and Francis Asbury were strong abolitionists. Unlike other religious groups at the time (late 18th century), the Methodists made an effort to reach people who lived in rural areas. Using circuit riders who would preach in a different area every night, the Methodists began earning many converts. During their sermons these circuit riders would preach against the evil of slavery. Economics played a major role in building the Abolitionist Movement. Since the early to mid-18th century, Delaware farmers began switching their stable crop from tobacco to wheat and corn. Tobacco, with its intensive labor requirements, was the main reason many slaves were brought to Delaware. Corn still lent itself to slavery but it did not require the number of slaves required by tobacco. However, the cultivation of wheat did not need the daily nurturing that tobacco required. Therefore the need for slave labor was beginning to decline.

The ideals that fueled the American Revolution were also a significant factor in the Abolitionist Movement. How could the colonists start a revolution based on natural rights and individual freedom while enslaving other human beings at the same time? Numerous anti-slavery petitions to the Delaware General Assembly pointed out this problem by quoting from the Declaration of Independence. Many Delawareans as well as other Americans saw the hypocrisy in this way of thinking. (See the lesson [That All Men Created Equal](#) for related information).

Abolitionist Societies began to spring up throughout the state during the late 18th century. These organizations, along with the Quakers and the Methodists, applied pressure to numerous Delawareans to manumit (free) their slaves. In many instances, they were successful. Politically, the Abolitionists put enough pressure on the legislature to pass a law in 1787 that weakened slavery throughout the state. This law banned the sale of slaves out of the state except when granted by a court. Many people in the Abolitionist Movement felt the elimination of the slave trade would gradually destroy the institution. Although the Abolitionists were successful in helping to free thousands of slaves in Delaware, they were unsuccessful in legally abolishing the institution. However, slavery continued to decline during the 19th century and many Delaware Abolitionists became active participants in the Underground Railroad.

DOCUMENT BACKGROUNDS

SLAVERY BROADSIDE

These types of documents were placed in public areas for review by the local citizens. This broadside was created during a time (1836) when Abolitionists were trying to ban slavery in the nation's capital. The document is part of the BroadSides Collection at the Delaware Public Archives. Note: Since this document is printed in clear type there is no transcription included.

PETITION TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

This petition was one of the first anti-slavery petitions sent to the Delaware General Assembly. It was read to the Assembly on January 9, 1786. The petition can be found in the Legislative Papers Collection (Series Number 1111.2) This collection is available on microfilm.