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THE  
CONSTITUTION

OF THE

AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY:

WITH

THE DECLARATION

OF THE

NATIONAL ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION

AT PHILADELPHIA, DECEMBER, 1833,

AND

THE ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC,

ISSUED BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIETY,

IN SEPTEMBER, 1835.

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"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men 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."—*Declaration of American Independence.*

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NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY,

143 NASSAU STREET,

1838.

**THE American Anti-Slavery Society** was formed by a Convention of citizens, convened by public notice, from ten different states, at Philadelphia, on the 4th of December, 1833. The Constitution of the Society, as then adopted, with some trifling amendments, is here presented. Also the Declaration of Sentiments, which was agreed upon and signed by that Convention. To these are added, an Address to the Public, issued by the Executive Committee, in September, 1835. These important official documents should be fully examined by all who wish to know what are the principles and plans of the Anti-Slavery Society.

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**CONSTITUTION**  
**OF THE**  
**AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.**

**PREAMBLE**

WHEREAS the Most High God "hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth," and hath commanded them to love their neighbors as themselves; and whereas our national existence is based upon this principle, as recognized in the Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" and whereas, after the lapse of nearly sixty years, since the faith and honor of the American people were pledged to this avowal, before Almighty God, and the world, nearly one-sixth part of the nation are held in bondage by their fellow-citizens; and whereas slavery is contrary to the principles of natural justice, of our republican form of government, and of the Christian religion, and is destructive to the prosperity of the country, while it is endangering the peace, union and liberties of the States; and whereas we believe it the duty and interest of the masters, immediately to emancipate their slaves, and that no scheme of expatriation, either voluntary or by compulsion, can remove this great and increasing evil; and whereas we believe that it is practicable, by appeals to the consciences, hearts, and interests of the people, to awaken a public sentiment throughout the nation, that will be opposed to the continuance of slavery in any part of the republic, and by effecting the speedy abolition of slavery, prevent a general convulsion; and whereas we believe we owe it to the oppressed, to our fellow-citizens who hold slaves, to our whole country, to posterity, and to God, to do all that is lawfully in our power to bring about the extinction of slavery, we do hereby agree, with a prayerful reliance on the Divine aid, to form ourselves into a society, to be governed by the following

**CONSTITUTION.**

**ARTICLE I.**

This Society shall be called the **AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY**

**ART. II.**

The object of this Society is the entire abolition of slavery in the United States. While it admits that each State in which slavery exists, has, by the Constitution of the United States, the exclusive right

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to legislate in regard to its abolition in said State, it shall aim to convince all our fellow-citizens, by arguments addressed to their understandings and consciences, that slaveholding is a heinous crime in the sight of God, and that the duty, safety, and best interests of all concerned, require its *immediate abandonment*, without expatriation. The Society will also endeavour, in a constitutional way, to influence Congress to put an end to the domestic slave-trade, and to abolish slavery in all those portions of our common country which come under its control, especially in the District of Columbia,—and likewise to prevent the extension of it to any state that may be hereafter admitted to the Union.

### ART. III.

This Society shall aim to elevate the character and condition of the people of color, by encouraging their intellectual, moral, and religious improvement, and by removing public prejudice, that thus they may, according to their intellectual and moral worth, share an equality with the whites, of civil and religious privileges; but this Society will never, in any way, countenance the oppressed in vindicating their rights by resorting to physical force.

### ART. IV.

Any person who consents to the principles of this Constitution, who contributes to the funds of this Society, and is not a slaveholder, may be a member of this Society, and shall be entitled to vote at the meetings.

### ART. V.

The officers of this Society shall be a President, Vice Presidents, a Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretaries, a Treasurer, and a Board of Managers, composed of the above, and not less than ten other members of the Society. They shall be annually elected by the members of the Society, and five shall constitute a quorum.

### ART. VI.

The Board of Managers shall annually elect an Executive Committee, to consist of not less than five, nor more than twelve members, which shall be located in New-York, who shall have power to enact their own by-laws, fill any vacancy in their body, and in the offices of Secretary and Treasurer, employ agents, determine what compensation shall be paid to agents, and to the Corresponding Secretaries, direct the Treasurer in the application of all moneys, and call special meetings of the Society. They shall make arrangements for all meetings of the Society, make an annual written report of their doings, the income, expenditures, and funds of the Society, and shall hold stated meetings, and adopt the most energetic measures in their power to advance the objects of the Society.

## ART. VII.

The President shall preside at all meeting of the Society, or in his absence one of the Vice Presidents, or, in their absence, a President *pro tem*. The Corresponding Secretaries shall conduct the correspondence of the Society. The Recording Secretary shall notify all meetings of the Society, and of the Executive Committee, and shall keep records of the same in separate books. The Treasurer shall collect the subscriptions, make payments at the direction of the Executive Committee, and present a written and audited account to accompany the annual report.

## ART. VIII.

The annual meeting of the Society shall be held each year at such time and place as the Executive Committee may direct, when the accounts of the Treasurer shall be presented, the annual report read, appropriate addresses delivered, the Officers chosen, and such other business transacted as shall be deemed expedient. A special meeting shall always be held on the Tuesday immediately preceding the second Thursday in May, in the city of New York, at ten o'clock, A. M., provided the annual meeting be not held there at that time.

## ART. IX.

Any Anti-Slavery Society, or association, founded on the same principles, may become auxiliary to this Society, and entitled to be represented at its meetings. The Officers of each Auxiliary Society shall be ex-officio members of the Parent Institution

## ART. X.

This Constitution may be amended, at any annual meeting of the Society, by a vote of two thirds of the members present, provided the amendments proposed have been previously submitted, in writing, to the Executive Committee.

## DECLARATION

*Of the Anti-Slavery, Convention, assembled at Philadelphia,  
December 4, 1833.*

The Convention, assembled in the city of Philadelphia, to organize a National Anti-Slavery Society, promptly seize the opportunity to promulgate the following DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, as cherished by them in relation to the enslavement of one-sixth portion of the American people.

More than fifty-seven years have elapsed since a band of patriots convened in this place, to devise measures for the deliverance of this country from a foreign yoke. The corner stone upon which they founded the TEMPLE OF FREEDOM was broadly this—"that all men are created equal; and they are endowed by their Creator, with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness." At the sound of their trumpet-call three millions of people rose up as from the sleep of death, and rushed to the strife of blood; deeming it more glorious to die instantly as freeman, than desirable to live one hour as slaves. They were few in number—poor in resources; but the honest conviction that TRUTH, JUSTICE and RIGHT, were on their side, made them invincible.

We have met together for the achievement of an enterprise, without which that of our fathers is incomplete; and which, for its magnitude, solemnity, and probable results upon the destiny of the world, as far transcends theirs as moral truth does physical force.

In purity of motive, in earnestness of zeal, in decision of purpose, in intrepidity of action, in steadfastness of faith, in sincerity of spirit, we would not be inferior to them.

*Their* principles led them to wage war against their oppressors, and to spill human blood like water, in order to be free. *Ours* forbid the doing of evil that good may come, and lead us to reject, and to entreat the oppressed to reject, the use of all carnal weapons for deliverance from bondage; relying solely upon those which are spiritual, and mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.

*Their* measures were physical resistance—the marshalling in arms—the hostile array—the mortal encounter. *Ours* shall be such as only the opposition of moral purity to moral corruption—the destruction of error by the potency of truth—the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love—and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance.

*Their* grievances, great as they were, were trifling in comparison with the wrongs and sufferings of those for whom we plead. Our fathers were never slaves—never bought and sold like cattle—never shut out from the light of knowledge and religion—never subjected to the lash of brutal task-masters.

But those for whose emancipation we are striving—constituting at the present time at least one-sixth part of our countrymen,—are recognized by the law, and treated by their fellow beings, as marketable commodities, as goods and chattels, as brute beasts; are plundered daily of the fruits of their toil without redress; really enjoying no constitutional nor legal protection from licentious and murderous outrages



upon their persons; are ruthlessly torn asunder—the tender babe from the arms of its frantic mother—the heart-broken wife from her weeping husband—at the caprice or pleasure of irresponsible tyrants. For the crime of having a dark complexion, they suffer the pangs of hunger, the infliction of stripes, and the ignominy of brutal servitude. They are kept in heathenish darkness by laws expressly enacted to make their instruction a criminal offence.

These are the prominent circumstances in the condition of more than two millions of our people, the proof of which may be found in thousands of indisputable facts, and in the laws of the slaveholding states.

Hence we maintain,—that in view of the civil and religious privileges of this nation, the guilt of its oppression is unequalled by any other on the face of the earth; and, therefore,

That it is bound to repent instantly, to undo the heavy burden, to break every yoke, and to let the oppressed go free.

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\*] a MAN STEALER:

That the slaves ought instantly to be set free, and brought under the protection of law:

That if they had lived from the time of Pharaoh down to the present period, and had been entailed through successive generations, their right to be free could never have been alienated, but their claims would have constantly risen in solemnity:

That all those laws which are now in force, admitting the right of slavery, are therefore before God utterly null and void; being an audacious usurpation of the Divine prerogative, a daring infringement on the law of nature, a base overthrow of the very foundations of the social compact, a complete extinction of all the relations, endearments, and obligations of mankind, and a presumptuous transgression of all the holy commandments—and that therefore they ought instantly to be abrogated.

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 IS NOT AN ARTICLE TO BE SOLD ;

Because the holders of slaves are not the just proprietors of what they claim ; freeing the slaves is not depriving them of property, but restoring it to its rightful owners ; 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 which pretends to aid, either directly or indirectly, in the emancipation of the 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 slave trade between the several states, and to abolish slavery in those portions of our territory which the Constitution has placed under its exclusive jurisdiction.

We also maintain that there are, at the present time, the highest obligations resting upon the people of the free states, to remove slavery by moral and political action, as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States. They are now living under a pledge of their tremendous physical force, to fasten the galling fetters of tyranny upon the limbs of millions in the southern states ; they are liable to be called at any moment to suppress a general insurrection of the slaves ; they authorize the slave owner to vote on three-fifths of his slaves as property, and thus enable him to perpetuate his oppression ; they support a standing army at the south for its protection ; and they seize the slave who has escaped into their territories, and send him back to be tortured by an enraged master or a brutal driver. This relation to slavery is criminal and full of danger : **IT MUST BE BROKEN UP.**

These are our views and principles—these our designs and measures. With entire confidence in the overruling justice of God, we plant ourselves upon the Declaration of our Independence and the truths of divine revelation as upon the Everlasting Rock.

We shall organize Anti-Slavery Societies, if possible, in every city, town and village, in our land.

We shall send forth agents to lift up the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty, and rebuke.

We shall circulate, unsparingly and extensively, anti-slavery tracts and periodicals.

We shall enlist the pulpit and the press in the cause of the suffering and the dumb.

We shall aim at a purification of the churches from all participation in the guilt of slavery.

We shall encourage the labor of freemen rather than that of slaves, by giving a preference to their productions: and

We shall spare no exertions nor means to bring the whole nation to speedy repentance.

Our trust for victory is solely in God. We may be personally defeated, but our principles never. TRUTH, JUSTICE, REASON, HUMANITY, must and will gloriously triumph. Already a host is coming up to the help of the Lord against the mighty, and the prospect before us is full of encouragement.

Submitting this DECLARATION to the candid examination of the people of this country, and of the friends of liberty throughout the world, we hereby affix our signatures to it; pledging ourselves that, under the guidance and by the help of Almighty God we will do all that in us lies, consistently with this Declaration of our principles, to overthrow the most execrable system of slavery that has ever been witnessed upon earth—to deliver our land from its deadliest curse—to wipe out the foulest stain which rests upon our national escutcheon—and to secure to the colored population of the United States all the rights and privileges which belong to them as men, and as Americans—come what may to our persons, our interests, or our reputation—whether we live to witness the triumph of LIBERTY, JUSTICE, and HUMANITY, or perish untimely as martyrs in this great, benevolent, and holy cause.

Done at Philadelphia, the sixth day of December, A. D. 1833.

## ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC.

In behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society, we solicit the candid attention of the public to the following declaration of our principles and objects. Were the charges which are brought against us made only by individuals who are interested in the continuance of Slavery, and by such as are influenced solely by unworthy motives, this address would be unnecessary; but there are those who merit and possess our esteem, who would not voluntarily do us injustice, and who have been led by gross misrepresentations to believe that we are pursuing measures at variance not only with the constitutional rights of the South, but with the precepts of humanity and religion. To such we offer the following explanations and assurances.

1st. We hold that Congress has no more right to abolish slavery in the Southern States than in the French West India Islands. Of course we desire no national legislation on the subject.

2d. We hold that Slavery can only be lawfully abolished by the Legislatures of the several states in which it prevails, and that the exercise of any other than moral influence, to induce such abolition, is unconstitutional.

3d. We believe that Congress has the same right to abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia, that the State governments have within their respective jurisdictions, and that it is their duty to efface so foul a blot from the national escutcheon.

4th. We believe that American citizens have the right to express and publish their opinions of the Constitutions, Laws, and Institutions of any and every State and Nation under Heaven; and we mean never to surrender the liberty of speech, of the press, or of conscience—blessings we have inherited from our fathers, and which we intend, as far as we are able, to transmit unimpaired to our children.

5th. We have uniformly deprecated all forcible attempts on the part of the Slaves to recover their liberty. And were it in our power to address them, we would exhort them to observe a quiet and peaceful demeanor, and would assure them that no insurrectionary movement on their part, would receive from us the slightest aid or countenance.

6th. We would deplore any servile insurrection, both on account of the calamities which would attend it, and on account of the occasion which it might furnish of increased severity and oppression.

7th. We are charged with sending incendiary publications to the South. If by the term *incendiary* is meant publications containing arguments and facts to prove Slavery to be a moral and political evil, and that duty and policy require its immediate abolition, the charge is true. But if this term is used to imply publications encouraging insurrection, and designed to excite the Slaves to break their fetters, the charge is utterly and unequivocally false. We beg our fellow-citizens to notice, that this charge is made without proof, and by many who confess that they have never read our publications, and that those who make it, offer to the public no evidence from our writings in support of it.

8th. We are accused of sending our publications to the Slaves, and it is asserted that their tendency is to excite insurrections. Both the charges are false. These publications are not intended for the Slaves; and were they able to read them, they would find in them no encouragement to insurrection.

9th. We are accused of employing Agents in the Slave States to distribute our publications. We have never had one such Agent. We have sent no *packages* of our papers to any person in those States for distribution, except to five respectable resident citizens, at their own request. But we have sent, by mail, single papers addressed to public officers, editors of newspapers, clergymen, and others. If, therefore, our object is to excite the Slaves to insurrection, the MASTERS are our Agents!

10th. We believe Slavery to be sinful, injurious to this, and to every other country in which it prevails; we believe immediate emancipation to be the duty of every slaveholder, and that the immediate abolition of slavery, by those who have the right to abolish it, would be safe and wise. These opinions we have freely expressed, and we certainly have no intention to refrain from expressing them in future, and urging them upon the consciences and hearts of our fellow-citizens who hold slaves or apologize for slavery.

11th. We believe that the education of the poor is required by duty, and by a regard for the permanency of our republican institutions. There are thousands and tens of thousands of our fellow-citizens, even in the free States, sunk in abject poverty, and who on account of their complexion are virtually *kept* in ignorance, and whose instruction in certain cases is actually prohibited by law! We are anxious to protect the rights, and to promote the virtue and happiness of the colored portion of our population, and on this account we have been charged with a design to encourage intermarriages between the whites and

blacks. This charge has been repeatedly, and is now again denied; while we repeat that the tendency of our sentiments is to put an end to the criminal amalgamation that prevails wherever slavery exists.

12th. We are accused of acts that tend to a dissolution of the Union, and even of wishing to dissolve it. We have never "calculated the value of the Union," because we believed it to be inestimable; and that the abolition of slavery will remove the chief danger of its dissolution; and one of the many reasons why we cherish, and will endeavor to preserve the constitution, is, that it restrains Congress from making any law "abridging the freedom of speech or of the press."

Such, fellow-citizens, are our principles. Are they unworthy of Republicans and of Christians? Or are they in truth so atrocious, that in order to prevent their diffusion, you are yourselves willing to surrender, at the dictation of others, the invaluable privilege of free discussion, the very birthright of Americans? Will you, in order that the abominations of slavery may be concealed from public view, and that the capital of your Republic may continue to be, as it now is, under the sanction of Congress, the great slave mart of the American continent, consent that the general government in acknowledged defiance of the Constitution and laws, shall appoint, throughout the length and breadth of your land, ten thousand censors of the press, each of whom shall have the right to inspect every document you may commit to the Post Office, and to suppress every pamphlet and newspaper, whether religious or political, which in his sovereign pleasure he may adjudge to contain an incendiary article? Surely we need not remind you, that if you submit to such an encroachment on your liberties, the days of our Republic are numbered, and that although abolitionists may be the first, they will not be the last victims offered at the shrine of arbitrary power.

ARTHUR TAPPAN, *President.*

JOHN RANKIN, *Treasurer.*

WILLIAM JAY, *Sec'ry of Foreign Correspondence.*

ELIZUR WRIGHT, JR. *Sec'ry of Domes. Cor.*

ABRAHAM L. COX, M. D., *Recording Sec'ry.*

LEWIS TAPPAN,

JOSHUA LEAVITT,

SAMUEL E. CORNISH,

SIMEON S. JOCELYN,

THEODORE S. WRIGHT.

*Members of  
the  
Executive Committee.*

New York, September 3d, 1835.

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