

Introduction

The abolitionist movement spread across America until 1861, when the American Civil War took place. As a result of the war, slavery came to an end during 1865 with the passing of the 13th Amendment; this was an accomplishment for abolitionists who had fought for emancipation as all black Americans were freed from slavery. However, queries quickly arose as to what brought about the emancipation of slavery. Prior to the war, there was extensive political conflict over slavery as Westward expansion caused substantial tensions between the North and the South with neither side pursuing attempts of a compromise. Due to this, questions as to why slavery should be eradicated helped guide the North to a secure anti-slave state status. This was prompted by the church as it preached of the sins of slavery and guided by foreign influences, such as Britain, who convinced many to support abolitionism. Propaganda put forward by abolitionists - such as William Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *the liberator* - suggests why the movement grew through the North. However, in order to thoroughly understand how substantial a cause they were in abolishing slavery we first must look at the reasons behind the movements' expansion. The rise of abolitionism can be argued to be due to many reasons; political tensions from acts - such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act - created altercations between the opposing sides, thus pushing many to abolitionism as they opposed Southern attempts to destroy the Mason-Dixon Line. Abolitionists used these events as propaganda and thus created a rise to the movement as they gained more support. Religion also created a rise in the movement as preachers described the sins of slavery, turning many away from the South. Furthermore, many individuals did not want to seem socially backwards to Britain and thus turned to abolitionism to appear as equals. This led to the argument, was it the abolitionist strength

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that brought about emancipation or the strengths of other factors? It can, however, be reasoned that the abolitionists used political events to expand the movement, causing a rise as political tensions created divides between the two sides, leading to the breakdown of the American Political System. Therefore, political events can be argued as the most effective factor.

Chapter 1

Political agitation caused by events played a key role in the rise of the abolitionist movement. Leading up to 1850, many debates over the issue of slavery took place within Congress. Tullock argues that the Missouri compromise of 1820 reduced the “fundamental division”¹ evident within the US as the creation of the Mason-Dixon Line established a political balance between slave and non-slave states. However, this only temporarily solved the issue of slavery as Westward expansion threatened the line overtime. As a result, the abolitionist movement intensified asangers over slavery’s expansion into the West enraged the North into fighting for a new compromise that would maintain the balance of power and end the expansion of slavery. Rising frictions between the sides resulted in a compromise being found during 1850 under the influence of Steven Douglas, which resolved the problems that had arisen since 1820. The 1850 Compromise settled arguments over the inclusion of slavery within new states acquired by America and thus reduced tensions within Congress. However, once again, this compromise took no preventive measures for the future and therefore simply delayed serious conflicts that arose as

Word Count: 260

¹ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.72

American territory expanded west. This set the US up for future conflicts over the expansion of slavery as it failed to solve the root problems within America. Tullock argues that the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act during 1854 was detrimental in creating the “major split”² in the American political system. The act became proof to northerners of a Slave Power Conspiracy and many in-turn believed that the slave holding community held control over political movements throughout America. This did not reason well with the North as the act became a symbol of Southern honour and thus pushed many to an anti-slave stance as they aimed for the destruction of the ‘slave power’. The act infuriated many and resulted in the creation of the Free-Soil Movement, leading to the destruction of America’s 2-party system. This shows that the mistrust created by political divides led to an increase of abolitionism as many felt it necessary to combat Southern Power, thus turning them to abolitionism. However, it was the formation of the Republican Party that created a huge divide within Congress as the Free-Soil Movement and the Liberal Party merged together. This proved the success of the abolitionist movement and shows that abolitionism was a rising issue within the US as more anti-slave politicians – including the likes of Lincoln - were voted into places of political power. Tullock believes politics played a role in the rise of abolitionism stating “many whose awareness of the evil of slavery was heightened by the rhetoric of its leaders swelling the ranks of political reformism, voting for the Free-Soil Party ... and fighting the gag rule in Congress”³. This shows that the political spectrum was affected as the knowledge of slavery’s immorality was heightened within the North,

Word Count: 323

² H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.72

³ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.73

subsequently leading to a rising number of political abolitionists. Harold highlights that abolitionists “were chiefly motivated by political and economic considerations rather than moral principles”⁴, showing that many abolitionist motives were caused by the economic benefits they would face if emancipation occurred. Free labour allowed the South to mass produce agricultural goods at a low cost, therefore the Northern economy would greatly benefit from emancipation. This caused a rise in the abolitionist movement as Northerners believed they would greatly benefit from the emancipation of slavery as it would lead to the destruction of free labour competition. This would allow for higher profits within the Northern states and thus pushed more to engage in the movement as a result.

However, the extent to which politics affected the rise of abolitionism can be questioned. Many elections did not rely on the candidate’s stance on slavery, and many politicians entirely ignored the issue – including Zachary Taylor who was voted into presidency during 1848 despite not having a platform on the issue of slavery– suggesting that arguments over slavery were not substantial within the political field. Farmer states that the Free Soil Party “won only 7000 votes”⁵ during its presidential campaign in 1840, therefore highlighting the limited effect that abolitionists had over the political spectrum as they failed to gain substantial support from the public. Tullock agrees stating they “polled 14.4% of Northern vote ... and failed to gain a single Electoral College vote”⁶ proving their lack of success; this made it harder for emancipation to occur as a lack of interest halted

Word Count: 297

⁴ S. Harold, *The Abolitionists and The South*, Kentucky, 1995, pg.2

⁵ A. Farmer, *America: Civil War and Westward Expansion*, London, 2015, pg.15

⁶ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.72

their progress. Furthermore, Southern resentment led to a rise of anti-abolitionism which limited the impact of the movement further, suggesting that an inadequate amount of work was done within the political spectrum to cause a rise in abolitionism.

Overall, political events did have some influence on the rise of abolitionism. The distrust that these events created led to huge divides within America and pushed many Northerners into an abolitionist stance to create an end to the 'Slave Power Conspiracy'. While political events did play a major role in the rise of abolitionism, certain setbacks – such as a lack of interest - negatively impacted the movement. Therefore, while this was the most important factor in creating a rise as political events created unfixable tensions between the two sides, other factors must also be examined in order to understand why this created such a substantial growth to the movement within America.

Chapter 2

Abolitionists used propaganda from political events to boost their movement and further focused on the brutality of slavery to convince more people to support the movement. Newman demonstrates the extensive work of abolitionists by stating that in order “to funnel masses of citizens into the abolitionist movement ... activists spent most of their time and money lecturing, pamphleteering, and organizing in every town and community possible”⁷. This is further noted by Tullock who says they “took part often in dangerous and hazardous freedom marches in the South”⁸, showing that abolitionists used a series of

Word Count: 272

⁷ R. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, North Carolina, 2002, pg.6

⁸ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.91

tactics in order to create growth within the movement. William Lloyd Garrison was a substantial abolitionist who led mainstream protests and thus helped create a substantial growth. He established his own anti-slave newspaper, *'The Liberator'* during 1831. The newspaper was quick to gain supporters as it emphasised the brutal nature of slavery – focusing on issues such as whippings, family separations, mutilations etc. – creating sympathy towards slaves, causing more individuals to flock to join the cause as his works continued to spread across America. Newman argues this was immensely influential in growing the movement stating “Abolitionists provoked Citizen’s outcry by publicizing gripping accounts of bondage and emotional slave narratives.”⁹ This establishes the idea that emotional arguments created a rise as abolitionists relied on the sympathy of others to push more into joining the movement. This suggests the work of Garrison was largely impactful in bringing about the sympathy of white Americans, causing more to join the movement. Furthermore, slave realities such as family separations were often used to push the philanthropic motive behind abolitionism. Keegan states that “It was this feature of slavery that principally drove the humanitarianism motive behind abolitionism”¹⁰. This again indicates that abolitionists relied on sympathy to promote emancipation and thus they used emotive techniques to create growth within the movement. Many agree that it was the radical abolitionists who created the rise, McPherson states “The most radical of them all, Wendell Phillips, lectured to packed houses all night all over the North”¹¹ therefore alluding to the idea that abolitionists actively took part in promoting the abolitionist movement to a

Word Count: 295

⁹ R. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, North Carolina, 2002, pg.7

¹⁰ J Keegan, *The American Civil War*, London, 2009, pg.17

¹¹ J McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, USA and Great Britain, 1988, pg.495

large extent, thus creating a growth. Uncle Tom's Cabin was hugely influential in causing a rise in the abolitionist movement, the book heavily focused on the brutality of slavery causing newfound sympathy on the sanctity of the family unit, which brought about a substantial rise in the Northern abolitionist movement. Furthermore, the Dred Scott case was frequently utilized as propaganda. It led to masses of Northerners believing in the slave power and consequently caused many to believe the South were directly defying the law as Chief Justice Taney argued that the North's ban on slavery was unconstitutional. This angered the North into joining the movement as they aimed to reduce southern power.

On the surface, widespread propaganda seemed to have a substantial influence on the rise of abolitionism. However, abolitionist propaganda was also relatively unsuccessful as it failed to break down deep-seated racism and prejudices. Their violent acts caused many to turn away from the group and abolitionists even occasionally faced violence in the North. Events such as John Brown's Raid and mobs due to the Fugitive Slave Act were used to show the violence of abolitionists in the form of Southern propaganda. Moreover, Garrison also had a limited impact as his paper had insubstantial sales. Thomas states "At the end of its first year, *the Liberator* ... had gained 50 white subscribers, and 2 years later they numbered less than 400"¹² thus suggesting that the newspaper did very little to promote the cause. His actions were negatively viewed in the eyes of Tullock who stated "Garrison's contribution was almost wholly destructive and retarded progress towards emancipation"¹³. This shows the radical nature of Garrison heavily contributed to the movement's lack of support; his

Word Count: 310

¹² J. Thomas, *The Liberator William Lloyd Garrison*, Canada, 1963, pg.131

¹³ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.78

writings outraged many who retaliated by producing anti-abolitionist works, negatively impacting the movement as plenty became infuriated with his extreme and uncompromising stance. These feelings grew on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line as radical abolitionists were hated in the North due to racist perceptions. Tullock backs up this argument, quoting Avery Craven, stating "*The Liberator* struck like lightning and humiliated, hurt and wounded Southern pride and forced it to retaliate by tightening up the slave codes and suppressing abolitionist literature"¹⁴, proving detrimental to the movement as angers arose over extreme abolitionist measures. This is agreed by other contemporary opinions; Tullock quotes Barnes who states "The reputation of *the Liberator* was made by its enemies and not by its subscribers"¹⁵, showing its unpopular stance. Many other abolitionist groups were equally unsuccessful, including the National Anti-Slave Society which only gain around 250,000 members despite being the leading abolitionist society. A lot of abolitionist propaganda was also used against them as well; this was the case for Uncle Tom's Cabin of which resulted in a stream of anti-abolitionist writings in the South, such as Fitzhugh's book '*Cannibals all!*'¹⁶ Apologist literature created the argument that Southern slaves were treated better than Northern factory workers, thus negatively impacting the movement.

Overall, Abolitionist propaganda played a substantial role in the growth of the movement; the reliance on building sympathy for slaves helped them to expand tensions already created by political events and thus pushed more people to join the movement.

Word Count: 289

¹⁴ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.81

¹⁵ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.77

¹⁶ G. Fitzhugh, *Cannibals all!, Or slaves without masters*, Virginia, 1857

However, most propaganda published by abolitionists' was met by a stream of apologist literature, which helped back-track the movement to a degree and further disproved some of their arguments. Moreover, abolitionists also struggled to gain a lot of support due to their extreme and unconventional tactics, therefore minimising the extent of the movement. Therefore, while this did create a rise in abolitionism, it cannot be seen as the most influential factor in the growth as it caused the South to turn their backs on the movement.

Chapter 3

Abolitionists also used foreign influences to promote their cause as they used equally developed countries to prove the positives of emancipation. One heavily utilized argument was Britain's banning of slavery, which allowed abolitionists to use the country as an example and gave them a greater influx of abolitionist literature, which they used to their advantage. Newman shows that abolitionist relied on foreign literature when he states, "The group reprinted 500 copies of a pamphlet entitled '*An inquiry into the causes of insurrection of the Negros...*' Originally issued for the British Parliament, the pamphlet quickly attracted attention of the abolitionists, for its main point mashed with their own"¹⁷. This shows abolitionist literature from Britain was heavily relied on to promote the movement within America. They hoped that showing other economically developed nations favoring emancipation and combining their message would lead to a chain result in America. Keegan further agrees stating the rise "had much to do with ... the enforcement of

Word Count: 258

¹⁷ R. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, North Carolina, 2002, pg.26

abolitionism by the British Parliament".¹⁸ This shows that Britain banning of slavery led others to believe they should follow a similar suit to avoid being economically and socially inferior. Farmer believes this stating "Some stress that it was part of a worldwide phenomenon, in which Britain, in particular, played a significant role. British anti-slavery writings certainly had a receptive audience in the USA"¹⁹, thus further proving the idea that American abolitionists heavily relied on British messages over abolitionism to promote the movement.

However, foreign influences can be argued to not have significantly impacted the growth of abolitionism. Many Northerners used their own propaganda to promote the movement and relied on former slave accounts – such as the ones of Fredrick Douglas and Margaret Garner – to promote the cause. This shows that many abolitionists preferred to use American means of promotion and thus they only used foreign propaganda to strengthen their arguments, therefore suggesting that foreign influences only helped to create a small rise in the abolitionist movement.

Chapter 4

The progress of the movement was significantly hindered as opposing views within both Congress and the group itself had substantially negative repercussions. Various abolitionists argued for several results; moderate abolitionists argued in favour of gradual emancipation while extreme abolitionists aimed for slavery to be immediately abolished. This is shown by

Word Count: 237

¹⁸ J Keegan, *The American Civil War*, London, 2009, pg.18

¹⁹ A. Farmer, *America: Civil War and Westward Expansion*, London, 2015, pg.14

Tulloch who states "the movement was made up of a large spectrum ... absolutism on one end to those who advocated political means."²⁰ This caused a lack of growth, highlighted in Harrold's novel as he quotes Louis Filler who stated that there was "Little evidence that the South was building an effective anti-slavery movement"²¹. This illustrates that despite abolitionist efforts to grow the movement in the South, they were largely unsuccessful because of Southern honour and their wish to protect slavery through States' rights. Furthermore, the movement as a whole failed to focus on the racial prejudices of the North as free blacks were, according to Tullock, "discriminated against, disfranchised and segregated"²². He also states that "By the 1830's a militant South had become implacably opposed to emancipation while the North ... remained ignorant or negrophobe"²³, showing that the abolitionist movement had little impact in the North or the South due to their racial tendencies and selfish motivations. Despite their best efforts in promoting the evil of slavery, they simply could not undo decades of racial prejudice built into Northern citizens and thus, their best efforts to stop slavery failed. These clashes were furthered as arguments of ending slavery's expansion were brought up by racist Northerners who feared slavery entering their states, as it may lead to a "Northern exodus of liberated slaves"²⁴ according to McPherson. This can be shown by Harrold who states that "The movement in

Word Count: 310

²⁰ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.72

²¹ S. Harold, *The Abolitionists and The South*, Kentucky, 1995, pg.16

²² H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.71

²³ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.71

²⁴ A. Farmer, *America: Civil War and Westward Expansion*, London, 2015, pg.15

“Conscientious reformers highlighted the evils of slavery, converting a majority of Northerners”²⁸, thus indicating that the brutality of slavery and the sinfulness of owning slaves pushed many to join the movement. Tullock argues this further by stating “new abolitionists were right to concentrate on the individual question of guilt and sin”²⁹. This further shows that the abolitionists relied on the church to spread the message of slavery being a sin in the eyes of God and thus proves that religion played a crucial role in the rise of abolitionism as many were converted due to the churches influence. Furthermore, the 2nd Great Awakening of Christianity created a rise in abolitionism as many believed that slavery reduced their chances of self-salvation. This caused a substantial amount of people to support the movement as even black individuals were encouraged to attempt personal redemption, thus creating the idea that black and white people were somewhat equal under the belief of religion.

However, many fire-eaters picked holes in abolitionist arguments against slavery. They pointed out that many of those in the bible owned slaves and thus this was used as substantial propaganda against abolitionism, allowing the South to continue the slave trade despite arguments of morality as the bible did not condemn the act of slavery. Churches were hugely affected by the differences of opinions. As a result, those in the North and the South were given contrasting messages over the morality of slavery. Keegan shows this by stating “the Baptist and Methodist churches ... splintered off Southern factions, which fell

Word Count: 291

²⁸ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.80

²⁹ H. Tullock, *The Debate on the American Civil War Era*, Manchester & New York, 1999, pg.91

out of communion with their Northern brethren"³⁰, proving that divisions were clear throughout American churches. Depending on the location, different views of slavery were portrayed through religion and thus the movement was limited in the South as Southern preachers spoke in favour of slavery.

Overall, religion did play a role in building the abolitionist movement as ministers began frequently preaching over the immorality of slavery thus leading to an increased support within the north. However, due to the bible actively using slaves, fire-eaters were provided with valuable propaganda which led to a rise in their movement as slavery could not be argued as completely immoral. Arguments over the sins of slavery also split the churches and therefore slavery was condemned in the North but accepted in the South. Thus, it can be argued that religion only caused a rise in the abolitionist movement to a small extent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the abolitionist movement rose in America for a multitude of reasons. It was, however, the use of propaganda created from political events that proved most useful in the rise of abolitionism. Main-stream politics dominated the slavery argument, with frictions over slavery being reemerged time-and-time again, proving the need for a change. The continuous rise of free-soil parties throughout America prior to 1860 proves that slavery was a dominating topic throughout debates at this time. However, this factor also did lead to the diminishing of abolitionism in the South, as fears over losing slavery began to arise

Word Count: 255

³⁰ J Keegan, *The American Civil War*, London, 2009, pg.79

when abolitionist parties began gaining political power. It was these conflicts which led to more disagreements within Congress and led to acts such as Kansas-Nebraska. These issues advanced the movement further as abolitionists profited off of the outrage caused, prompting a wave of propaganda about emancipation to surge through the North. However, the creation of the Republican Party – and thus Lincoln’s presidency – terrified the South into fighting for the right to own slaves. They continuously slaughtered arguments within Congress over the allowance of slavery and soon the South believed that the North was actively working to breach their constitutional rights, thus causing a rise. Furthermore, many favoured abolitionism solely as it prevented slavery expanding into Northern and Western territory. This implies that racial motivations played a substantial role in abolitionism’s growth. While religion played a sizable role in America during the 1800’s, the extent to which many individuals were willing to follow this can be questioned. Despite many Priests arguing the sin of slavery, the act was not condemned in the bible, therefore allowing the South to endorse slavery and this therefore merely contributed to the splitting of the churches. While abolitionist literature from Britain did have an effect on the movement, this seemed to be rather limited as many abolitionists favoured American abolitionist literature or slave narratives, therefore this had a limited contribution to the cause. Setbacks also limited the rise of the movement; without these issues, it could be argued that the emancipation of slavery may have come about sooner. The movement itself seemed rather contradictory, some abolitionists fought in favour of immediate emancipation while others argued for slavery to be gradually abolished. This created divides amongst the movement, limiting their impact. It is because of these reasons that it can be argued that political events were the primary cause behind the rise of the abolitionist

Word Count: 308

movement up until 1860. Abolitionists used Northern reactions to political events to build anger over slavery and gain support to the cause, which impacted the movement greatly as more people flocked to join the movement. While it can be argued that this did not impact the South, this was not detrimental to the movement. Due to the North having a substantial population, abolitionists merely required Northern support in order to make an impact within the political field. Therefore, political events can best explain the growth of the abolitionist movement prior to 1860.

Word Count: 92

Bibliography

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Farmer, Alan – London 2015

- Farmer's book covered many different factors in the rise of abolitionism within America and thus contributed to my dissertation as it allowed me the basis to begin further research into certain topics and factors of growth.

'Battle-cry of freedom'

McPherson, James – USA and Great Britain, 1988

- McPherson's book focused on the impact of propaganda on the movement and the events that caused the increase of abolitionist literature, therefore allowing me to build my argument within the 2nd chapter.

'Cannibals all!, Or Slaves Without Masters'

Fitzhugh, George – Virginia, 1857

- While Fitzhugh's novel did not directly assist me in writing my dissertation it did allow me to view examples of the apologist literature produced at the time of the rising movement.

'The Abolitionists and the South'

Harrold, Stanley – Kentucky, 1995

- As Harrold's novel largely focused on the effects of abolitionism in the South it helped to provide me with reasons behind the movements' lack of growth. The novel helped to describe the lack of impact the movement had on the South and thus allowed me to make inclusive statements over the growth of the movement.

'The American Civil War'

Keegan, John – London 2009

- Keegan's novel largely focused on the religious reasonings behind the growth of abolitionism and thus helped me expand my knowledge over this area, helping me in writing a more historically accurate dissertation.

'The debate on the American Civil War era'

Tullock, Hugh – Manchester and New York, 1999

- Tullock's book provided me with insightful knowledge over the political factors in the rise of abolitionism as the in-depth analysis of the effects of abolitionism on America's political system provided me with arguments for and against slavery at the time.

'The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison'

Thomas, John – Canada, 1963

- Thomas' book focused solely on Garrison's contribution to the abolitionist movement, and thus allowed me to gain knowledge over his role in the growth of abolitionism within America.

'The transformation of American Abolitionism (fighting slavery in the early republic)'

Newman, Richard – North Carolina, 2002

- Newman's novel provided me with invaluable religious reasonings behind the growth of abolitionism within the North and thus greatly helped me to write the 5th chapter of my dissertation.