

Issue of defining liberty in united states' ideology



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Liberty has been a cornerstone of the United States' ideology since its inception in 1776. The very creation of our country was inspired by a thirst for liberty from a foreign oppressor. The Declaration of Independence makes clear that the Founding Fathers valued liberty and believed that the government exists to ensure the protection of the people's freedoms. Though the U. S was one of the first countries to have this mindset and to structure their government around it, the path to equality has been fraught with challenges from the very government created to defend our freedom. These challenges were fought by a group of activists striving to make the United States great and free for all of its citizens. Though all of these activists fought for freedom, their definition of liberty and their opinion of who deserves that liberty differs from person to person.

Although the Declaration of Independence is a revolutionary document that laid the groundwork for the representative liberal democracy we enjoy today, it contains key flaws that allowed the Founding Fathers to prevent their ideas from influencing too much of their way of life. Slaveholding, repression of women, and even disenfranchisement of poor men was commonplace during the colonial era. These systems, which the Founders saw as integral to the economy and society of the fledgling U. S, could not quickly be replaced and were therefore necessary in order to achieve liberty for the "ruling" wealthy class. At the very beginning of the Declaration, the founders write about rights "endowed by their Creator". These rights would be fought for by oppressed groups for hundreds of years. Even though the liberties promised to all men are enshrined in the very document which created the United States, different systems of oppression have sought to reduce those rights in

order to benefit the rich and powerful. These four authors realized the flaws in this system of oppression, and though they fought it in different ways, they all had a common desire to make the United States a place of liberty and freedom for everyone.

The push to end slavery was one of the first major liberation movements in the United States. The abolitionist movement, which started long before the Declaration of Independence had even been written, became a far-reaching and influential group that used a variety of methods to free individuals, help escaped slaves, and push for the abolition of slavery. For instance, John Brown's violent uprising, though largely ineffective, demonstrated that violence was becoming more common in the abolitionist movement. Violence had been a method of the Anti-Slavery movement since long before John Brown raided the Federal Armory in Virginia. Nat Turner's rebellion, which started and was put down in August of 1831, was the first recorded slave rebellion in the United States. Though Turner's rebellion was just as unsuccessful as Brown's, it demonstrated the lengths abolitionists were willing to go in order to free slaves and to spread fear among slave owners.

Turner's rebellion was an exception to the mostly peaceful abolitionist movement. However, the fruitless results of the movement especially right before the Civil War led more and more abolitionists to resort to more drastic measures in order to achieve their goals. John Brown's document, which outlines his beliefs, ideas, and motives, includes multiple allusions to the Declaration of Independence, including his belief in the rights granted to all people by the creator. He uses theology and enlightenment ideas to prove that all men are equal under God and that they should be equal and free

<https://assignbuster.com/issue-of-defining-liberty-in-united-states-ideology/>

under the law. Unlike the Declaration, Brown comments on the hypocrisy of the judicial system. He says that, had he led a rebellion for the rich and powerful, he would not have faced the death penalty for his actions. Brown realized the systems that oppressed slaves also worked to oppress anyone who worked against the system itself.

Other abolitionists used peaceful methods to achieve their goals. For instance, William Garrison used journalism to change minds and affect change across the country. His document, *The Liberator*, contrasts iconic monuments that represent liberty and the existence of slavery. Garrison actually directly references the Declaration of Independence directly- saying that the rights which the Founding Fathers sought should apply to the African American population as well. He does something very unique that many abolitionists would never have done, even in a radical newspaper. At the end of the excerpt, Garrison becomes harsher and blames even those apathetic to the abolitionist cause for enabling slavery. Even Brown and Walker, fervent abolitionists who fought for abolition their entire lives, never blamed the people for sustaining slavery. While Walker criticizes the American people for being hypocritical and not realizing that African Americans deserve rights, he does not go as far as to blame the ordinary American for being apathetic to the cause.

All of these abolitionists had very similar goals; they all fought for the abolition of slavery and for equal rights for African Americans. Despite this common goal, all three men had different ways of writing about and working to end slavery. Although Brown used violence and Walker/Garrison used journalism, all three used the founding principles of the United States

enshrined in the Declaration of Independence to support their views and to justify the abolition of slavery. The three men all invoked the very beginning of the preamble and focused specifically on the phrase “ *That all men are created equal* ”.

Sarah Grimke also used the Declaration of Independence and enlightenment ideas to support her calls for women’s rights. She says that the laws and societal standards that applied to women at the time created an environment that destroyed their individuality and stripped them of their liberties. She also made references to the enlightenment specifically; even comparing the state of women in America to slavery. Grimke’s comparison is accurate; women were not allowed to own property, vote, or hold public office. Women had few legal rights, especially after getting married. Grimke’s observations show that she saw liberty similarly to her abolitionist compatriots- she just wanted those liberties to apply to herself and women across the country as well.

All four activists had very similar ideas about liberty and freedom. They all believed in the right to live without discrimination, to vote, and to be free. However, their differences stem in their beliefs on who deserves these rights. In the suffragettes’ case, women deserved these rights. From the point of view of the abolitionists, African Americans deserved these rights. This conversation on who deserves what rights continues to this day and will be a national discussion for decades to come.

BIOGRAPHIES-

DAVID WALKER-

<https://assignbuster.com/issue-of-defining-liberty-in-united-states-ideology/>

David Walker was born on September 28, 1785, to a free woman. His father, who had been enslaved, had died before Walker's birth. Although Walker was never enslaved because of his mother's free status, he lived in North Carolina (a slave state) and witnessed some of the atrocities committed against slaves in his early childhood. This had a profound effect on young David Walker, leading him to leave North Carolina as a young adult and move to Massachusetts. After leaving the South, Walker became deeply involved in activism, helping both poor Bostonians and escaped slaves who had made their way north. Walker eventually became involved in an influential abolitionist newspaper called the *Freedom's Journal*. Print was an effective means of communicating his vehement anti-slavery views to a wider audience than ever before.

In the fall of 1829, Walker published one of the first abolitionist texts in the United States, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles*. This document sought to show Americans the true evils of slavery and to encourage action in fighting an oppressive system. This was also one of the first abolitionist texts that pressed the ordinary white American to oppose slavery based on morals rather than based on economic factors.

David Walker was an activist ahead of his time. Anti-slavery sentiment, though prevalent in isolated groups such as Quakers and some Methodists, had not yet become common among the majority of Americans. Even Northerners, pleased with cotton imports that formed the backbone of their textile-based economies, felt that slavery was a necessary evil to keep their economy strong.

WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON-

William Lloyd Garrison was born on December 10, 1805, in Massachusetts to a pair of immigrants from British Canada. When Garrison was only a few years old, his father abandoned Garrison and his mother, a devout Christian. Garrison received a basic education from a Baptist deacon before starting an apprenticeship with a local newspaper, the *Newburyport Herald*. He proved to be a gifted writer, later buying his own newspaper with money borrowed from his employers at the *Herald*. This paper, called the *Newburyport Free Press*, folded after just a few years. The experience of owning his own paper would help Garrison as he worked on his most influential texts and speeches.

Garrison joined the abolitionist movement at 25, quickly joining, then denouncing, the American Colonization Society. This group advocated the mass migration of slaves from the United States to the coast of Africa. While Garrison supported the emancipation of slaves, he eventually came to realize that the goal of the Society was to reduce the number of freed slaves and to use the migration as a means of retaining slavery. He eventually realized this and renounced the society, quickly issuing a public apology and criticizing all involved in the organization.

After leaving the American Colonization Society, Garrison started his own abolitionist paper, aptly named *The Liberator*. This paper made him a prominent abolitionist and gave him a large enough platform to effectively communicate his abolitionist message and making him a reputable name in the abolitionist movement. As he became a more and more prominent abolitionist, Garrison recognized the need for better organization in the

abolitionist movement. He created two different organizations, the American Anti-Slavery Society and The New England Anti-Slavery Society. Despite his best efforts, his emphasis on writing rather than political action led to divisions within both societies.

Before and during the Civil War, Garrison took a surprising stance on the Confederacy and Union. He felt that the Union should dissolve and that the Free and Slave states should separate because of the extreme cultural differences between the two groups of states. After the war and the Emancipation Proclamation, Garrison began to fade from public life. He left his various abolitionist groups and discontinued *The Liberator*. William Garrison's health began to fail, and he passed away on May 24, 1879.

William Lloyd Garrison lived in an interesting time for the abolitionist movement. He was one of the few activists of his time to see his hard work come to fruition. Though true equality for African-Americans would not be realized for another century, Garrison was integral in ending slavery and freeing millions of people from unjust imprisonment.

SARAH M GRIMKE-

Sarah M Grimke was born on November 26, 1792. Her parents were rich landowners in South Carolina, which had one of the highest populations of slaves in the US at the time. As Grimke grew up, she began to realize the subtle differences between the subpar education she was getting versus the education her brothers were getting. Her "education" mainly consisted of painting, music, and sewing while her brothers learned about typical subjects like math and Latin. Grimke managed to get a basic education from her older
<https://assignbuster.com/issue-of-defining-liberty-in-united-states-ideology/>

brother, who saw her intelligence and recognized her gifts. He taught her about the fundamentals of the Enlightenment and Theology, as well as some law. As the family was wealthy and traditional, they owned a large number of slaves to maintain their plantation. Grimke's education eventually led her to begin to realize the differences between her family's status and the way they treated their slaves. She even went so far as to teach them how to read until her father found out and put a stop to it.

In the early 1820s, Grimke visited Philadelphia, a predominantly Quaker city. Quakers were vehement abolitionists, as slavery was against their religion. They believed that slavery was evil and that they had a moral imperative to help enslaved peoples across the country. Grimke was instantly enamored with this new religion, especially as it allowed women to become ministers and leaders within the church hierarchy. Despite this, many prominent men still dismissed Grimke, going so far as to publicly denounce Sarah and her sister Angelina.

Despite this, both sisters continued writing; pumping out works that addressed a variety of topics from abolition to women's suffrage. During the Civil War, Sarah came out in favor of the Union and its increasingly pro-abolitionist stance. After the war, she continued to fight for civil rights for both women and African Americans; she was vice president of a suffrage group in Massachusetts, wrote more on the subject, and led a protest in Boston in 1870 to fight for the right to vote. Grimke was active in her old age but eventually passed away on December 23, 1873.

Grimke was a very unique historical figure. She fought for women's rights in a time before the idea had become as mainstream as the early 20th century, while actively working in the abolitionist movement as well. During her time in activism, she managed to write dozens of works read by people across the country- one of the first American women to accomplish such a feat. Sarah Grimke was a pioneer in the feminist movement.

JOHN BROWN-

John Brown was born on May 18, 1800, in Torrington, Connecticut. His parents worked in the tannery business and were fervent abolitionists. Brown's family would eventually move to Ohio, opening a small tannery business there. While in Hudson, Brown's father Owen would operate a safe house on the Underground Railroad. Owen also instilled very anti-slavery views in his sons, sending John to study under the famous abolitionist Elizur Wright. Owen also supported multiple educational and anti-slavery ventures, including the Western Reserve College and Preparatory School and the Oberlin Institute.

After he turned 16, John left Ohio and went to study in Massachusetts and Connecticut to become a minister. However, medical problems and money issues prevented him from finishing his studies. After leaving school, Brown returned to Ohio and worked at his father's tannery for a while; he would later open his own with his adopted brother.

Brown married a woman named Dianthe Lusk in 1820. The couple moved to Pennsylvania in order to find a safe place to operate a stop Underground Railroad. He operated this stop from 1825 to 1835, saving thousands of

<https://assignbuster.com/issue-of-defining-liberty-in-united-states-ideology/>

escaped slaves. Brown would later move to Springfield, Massachusetts and Lake Placid, New York. He was politically active in both places and worked to further the abolitionist movement wherever he went. In 1855, Brown decided to move to Kansas in order to help bring it into the Union as a free state. He frequently used violence to fight pro-slavery groups and condemned the anti-slavery movement for being too weak and pacifistic. After moving to Virginia in 1859, he began preparing a large and violent uprising and eventually attacked a Federal Arsenal on October 16, 1859. Although he planned for slaves and other abolitionists to join his movement after seeing their initial success, his revolt was put down by the local militia and U. S Marines before it could gain any traction.

John Brown was an outlier in the abolitionist movement. Although his intentions were just, his methods left room for criticism from both the Pro and Anti-Slavery movements. He revolted right before the Civil War, making his actions particularly consequential. His revolt happened just months before South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union.

Works Cited

- Powell, William S. " David Walker." *David Walker, 1785-1830* , docsouth. unc. edu/nc/walker/bio. html.
- " William Lloyd Garrison." *PBS* , Public Broadcasting Service, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1561.html>.
- " William L. Garrison." *William L. Garrison - Ohio History Central* , http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/William_L._Garrison.

- Alexander, Kerri Lee. " Sarah Moore Grimké." *National Women's History Museum* , <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/sarah-moore-grimke>.
- " Sarah Grimke." *History of American Women* , 2 Apr. 2017, <http://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2013/03/sarah-grimke.html>.
- " John Brown." *American Battlefield Trust* , 25 Mar. 2019, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/john-brown>.
- Bordewich, Fergus M. " John Brown's Day of Reckoning." *Smithsonian.com* , Smithsonian Institution, 1 Oct. 2009, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/john-browns-day-of-reckoning-139165084/>.
- *PBS* , Public Broadcasting Service, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1550.html>.