
SECTION II

Abolitionism in Black and White (1831-1840)

Lesson 9

Abolitionist Propaganda

Grade Level: Middle & High School

Objectives:

Students will

- Understand propaganda as a technique of persuasion.
- Analyze abolitionist print propaganda.
- Create abolitionist propaganda posters.

Time: Two 50-minute class periods

Materials:

- Worksheet 1: Abolitionist Propaganda

Background:

Established by abolitionists in 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society was responsible for some of the most sophisticated print propaganda drives during the early 19th century. Although they were initially deemed a radical minority by the public, the abolitionists ensured that their message to end slavery and promote political and legal equality were seen and heard by various communities across the country. They took advantage of newer print technologies that allowed materials to be cheaply mass-produced. Anti-slavery propaganda included illustrated periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides.

Abolitionists printed these materials despite threats of violence. In July 1834, angry mobs descended upon the homes of a number of abolitionists and assaulted many ordinary African-American residents in Manhattan. New York's anti-abolition or anti-race riot did little to deter the abolitionists from their political work. In 1835, Lewis Tappan, an abolitionist who originally lived in Manhattan but later became a long term Brooklyn Heights resident, launched a postal campaign. Thousands of anti-slavery publications were sent to post offices in the North and South intended to persuade recipients of slavery's sin through moral suasion. On July 29, 1835, in Charleston, South Carolina, mobs were furious at abolitionists and burned the mailbags and mock effigies of Lewis Tappan.

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THE
AMERICAN
ANTI-SLAVERY
ALMANAC,
FOR
1838,

Being the second after Bissextile or Leap-Year, and the 62nd of American Independence. Adapted to most parts of the United States.



"Thus saith the Lord, Execute judgment in the MORNING, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor."

N. SOUTHARD, EDITOR.

BOSTON:
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No. 2 School Street

This image depicts Boston abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison cutting down the tree of slavery with his axe. On the other side, propping up the tree and ready to attack Garrison, is a church minister and President Martin Van Buren. Abolitionists often criticized the church and the government for allowing slavery to flourish.

Cover Page, *The American Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1838*. N. Southard. 1838. Slavery pamphlet collection. PAMP American-4. Brooklyn Historical Society.

LESSON PROCEDURES

1. Ask students to think about major political and social causes, such as environmentalism, human rights, or the “Occupy” movement. Ask them to identify what people do to promote these causes and spread their message to others.

2. Explain to students the importance of persuasion - whether it be speaking, writing, or images - to convince people to back a particular cause.

3. Write the term “propaganda” on the board. Ask students the following questions:

- What is propaganda?
- Give an example of propaganda that you have come across in your daily life.
- What are the purposes of propaganda?
- Who uses propaganda?

Make sure that students understand that propaganda is a technique to sway people’s opinions, adopt a certain behavior, or perform a particular action.

4. Explain to students that in Brooklyn, abolitionists produced some of the most sophisticated print propaganda campaigns and distributed them widely. By taking advantage of new printing technologies, they were able to cheaply mass-produce anti-slavery newspapers, pamphlets, and broadsides. These materials were designed to appeal to a wide audience: adults and children, men and women, black and white people, slaveholders, and anti-slavery advocates.

5. Place students in small groups and distribute **Worksheet 1: Abolitionist Propaganda**. For each artifact, have students discuss the following questions:

- What message about slavery is this print campaign conveying?
- What techniques did the designer of this document use to convey the message?
- Who might the target audience be? Give evidence from the document.
- What was your emotional reaction to the document?
- How might different groups (blacks, whites, Northerners, Southerners, etc.) respond to seeing this document?
- Do you find this message effective? Support your response with evidence from the document.

6. Explain to students that in an effort to gain support for the cause, some abolitionist propaganda portrayed blacks only as victims of oppression and slavery and whites as heroes. Ask students to think of the potential effects of portraying African Americans as victims and white abolitionists as heroes.

7. Ask students to imagine that they are abolitionists. Have them design a broadside or a one-sheet poster, calling for the abolition of slavery and an explanation of why it should be abolished.

Linking Past and Present

- Have students use social media, such as Facebook or Twitter, to create a series of abolitionist promotional messages. Have them reflect on what has been gained and lost by new technology when it comes to promoting an issue or cause.