Decloration of Sentiment of the American Anti-Slavery Society (modified)

Source: This document officially created the American Anti-Slavery Society on December 4, 1833, in Philadelphia. It was written by William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of the abolitionist newspaper The Liberator and the new president of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

DECLARATION

More than fifty-seven years have gone by since a band of patriots [the Founding Fathers] met in this place to make this country free of foreign rule. They said “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 [against Britain]. They were few in number and poor in resources; but the honest conviction that Truth, Justice and Right were on their side, made them invincible.

We have met together now to do something that is necessary in order to make the achievement of our fathers complete. We do not want to be inferior to them.

Slaves, whose emancipation we are fighting for, make up at least one-sixth of our countrymen. But they are treated by the law and by their fellow beings as marketable commodities, as brute beasts. Their labor is stolen from them daily, and they have no constitutional or legal protection from harm against them. The tender babe is taken from the arms of its frantic mother, and the heart-broken wife is taken from her weeping husband by irresponsible tyrants. For the crime of having dark skin, the suffer the pangs of hunger, whipping, and brutal servitude. They are kept in ignorance by laws that forbid their education.

These are the circumstances of more than two million of our people.

We argue that this is the worst oppression on the face of the earth.

We further argue that no man has a right to enslave his brother, or to keep him as a piece of merchandise or to brutalize his mind by denying him intellectual, social and moral improvement.

The right to enjoy liberty is inalienable. 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.

We believe that every American citizen, who detains a human being in involuntary bondage as his property, is, according to the Bible, a man-stealer.

We believe that the slaves ought instantly to be set free, and brought under the protection of law.

We believe that all those laws which are now in force, admitting the right of slavery, should be instantly repealed.
We believe that all persons of color should get the same privileges as others, and that paths should be opened as widely to them as to persons of a white complexion.

We believe that no compensation should be given to the planters emancipating their slaves, because that would violate the fundamental principle that man cannot hold property in man; because slavery is a crime; because freeing the slave is not depriving a slaveholder of property but restoring it to its rightful owner. It is not wronging the master, but righting the slave—restoring him to himself.

We believe that no compensation should be given to the planters emancipating their slaves 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 think that any plan to expatriate the slaves is cruel and dangerous.

We fully and unanimously recognise the right of each State to make laws about slavery within its limits, and we know that Congress, under our current laws, has no right to interfere with any of the slave states.

But we argue that Congress has a right to suppress the domestic slave trade between the States, and to abolish slavery in the territories.

We also believe that people in the free states have an obligation to end slavery.

With confidence in the justice of God, these are our plans:

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

We shall send people out to criticize slavery.

We shall circulate anti-slavery writings and newspapers.

We shall ask the church and the press for help.

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 not buying products made by slaves.

We shall work as hard as we can to bring the nation to 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.

To the people of this country and to the friends of liberty throughout the world, we pledge that with the help of God we will do everything we can to overthrow the most terrible system of slavery that has
ever been witnessed upon earth and to deliver our land from its deadliest curse. We pledge to get for
the colored population of the United States all the rights and privileges which belong to them as men
and as Americans, whether we live or die in the attempt.

invincible = unbeatable

emancipation = freedom

countrymen = fellow Americans

commodity, merchandise = something that can be bought and sold

compensation = payment

expatriate = send someone out of the country

suppress = keep down

repentance = a state of asking forgiveness for sins

Modified from the original source available at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.