

From the Constitution of the American Anti-slavery Society

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.

New York, September 3d, 1835.