

## Resistance and Abolition

Resistance to slavery came in many forms, all of which contributed to the abolition of slavery as an institution in the Americas in the second half of the nineteenth century. There were two main arms of resistance: that of slaves themselves and that of abolitionists, whose calls for the end of slavery became louder and more forceful beginning in the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

Africans resisted slavery in several ways. First, they adopted defensive measures in their own villages to elude capture by slavers. Second, they launched attacks on the crews aboard slave ships. Slavers' reports document over 400 such attacks, but scholars believe there were many more. Third, once ashore, Africans ran away, sometimes establishing Maroon communities. Maroon communities, such as those in Suriname and Jamaica, and the Republic of Palmares in Brazil, warred with white settlers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Fourth, African slaves revolted on the very lands on which they were enslaved. The first slave revolt in the Americas we know of occurred in 1522 on the island of Hispaniola. This revolt, like most that would follow in the next 250 years, was quickly put down. During the late eighteenth century, however, the Americas saw an increase in slave revolts, especially in the French Caribbean. The French and Haitian Revolutions, which began in 1789 and 1791 respectively, largely inspired these revolts. Both revolutions were fought in the name of natural rights and the equality of men, ideas not lost on those who remained enslaved in the French colonial world. The French revolutionary government even abolished slavery in its colonies, although this did not last for very long, as slavery was soon reinstated during the reign of Napoleon. Slave revolts continued into the nineteenth century in British and Spanish Caribbean colonies. A revolt on the British-controlled island of Barbados in 1816 involved 20,000 slaves from over seventy plantations.

In 1831, a slave revolt in Virginia led by Nat Turner, although small in comparison with other slave revolts of the same period, became a symbol for slaveholders in the U.S. of the danger posed by abolition. For others, however, two decades of increased slave unrest supported calls for the end of slavery. These were the individuals involved in anti-slavery movements, which began gaining substantial ground with public opinion beginning in the 1780s. The anti-slavery movement was perhaps strongest in Britain, where member of Parliament William Wilberforce led anti-slavery campaigns from the 1780s onwards. Evangelical Protestant Christians joined him. These campaigns led to thousands of petitions to end slavery between the 1780s and 1830s. The slave trade was anti-slavery's first target and in 1787 the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was established in Britain. Wilberforce and evangelical Protestants saw slavery and slaveholders as evil. So, too, did the Quakers (or the Society of Friends). On both sides of the Atlantic, Quakers attacked slavery as immoral and prohibited their members from owning slaves or being involved in any part of the slave trade.

In addition to these moral attacks on slavery, Enlightenment thinkers attacked slavery on philosophical grounds. French Enlightenment philosophers such as Montesquieu argued that slavery went against the natural rights of man. During the French

Revolution, members of the Society of the Friends of Blacks, which originated among Enlightenment thinkers, joined with free blacks from the Caribbean colonies living in France, who organized the Society of Colored Citizens, to advocate for equal rights for free people of color and the end of slavery. The anti-slavery movement scored a victory in 1807 when the United States and then Britain signed bills to end their nations' involvement in the slave trade. Many in the anti-slavery movement believed this was the first step to abolishing slavery as an institution.