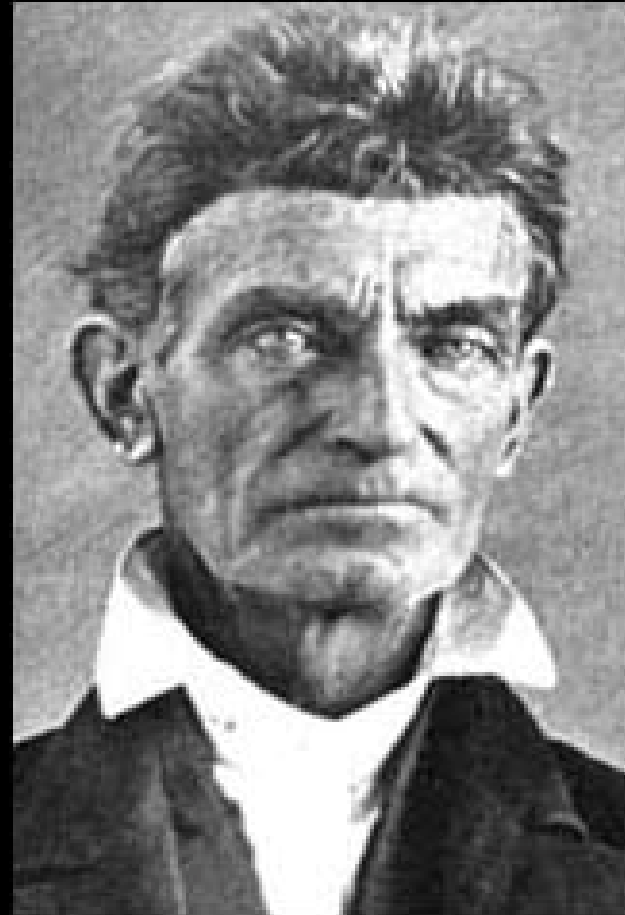


Abolitionists



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<http://americanabolitionist.liberalarts.iupui.edu/brief.htm>

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Growing up in the early 1800s, Abraham Lincoln was well-aware of the institution of slavery as well as the anti-slavery movement, known as “Abolitionism.” Likewise, Lincoln was familiar with political initiatives such as the Missouri Compromise (1820) and the Compromise of 1850, both of which tried to regulate the spread of the “peculiar institution.”

In Kentucky, the Lincolns lived near families that owned slaves. (The Lincolns did not.) The Lincolns moved to Indiana in 1816, partly because Abraham’s father wanted to live in a “free” territory. Once there, Lincoln’s father and step-mother joined a Baptist church, at which the young Lincoln heard anti-slavery sermons. Although the Lincolns, were opposed to human bondage (slavery), they were probably as racist as most of their neighbors, and did not believe in the complete equality between black and white people. One of Lincoln’s first excursions away from home was to take a load of farm produce down the Mississippi River to New Orleans where he saw slaves at work and at auction.

As a young adult, living in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln would have read newspaper articles both for and against slavery. The Abolitionist newspaper of William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator*, for instance, began circulation in 1831. Although

most northern white people disliked the idea of slavery, most northerners also disliked the vocal Abolitionists who advocated the end of slavery. “Hot head” abolitionists, such as John Brown, were considered radicals and “agitators.” As an elected state representative, Lincoln would denounce the institution of slavery but would not endorse legislation giving equal rights to people of color; that would have been political suicide. He hoped that restricting the spread of slavery would eventually lead to its demise in America.

As an adult, Lincoln’s attitudes about slavery seem confusing. He believed Jefferson’s statement in the *Declaration of Independence* that “all Men are created equal” but never suggested that it be applied to “negroes.” He supported legislation that forbade the expansion of slavery into newly acquired territories of the United States. He wrote letters to southerners to reassure slave owners that he had no intention of “...directly, or indirectly, interfer(ing) with their slaves...” But he also made statements, such as the one from his famous *House Divided* speech, saying that “this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free.”

When Lincoln joined the Republican Party in 1856, he became politically linked with those who would put an end to slavery. However, by his words and actions, it appears that Lincoln became an active abolitionist only after the Civil War began.

