# Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society Constitution

December 4, 1833

The American Anti-Slavery Society was founded in Philadelphia in 1833. Under the leadership of the very vocal William Lloyd Garrison, the organization had over 400 chapters by 1835, and by 1838 there were 1,350 chapters with more than 250,000 members.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Whereas the Most High God "hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,"[[2]](#footnote-2) and hath commanded them to love their neighbors as themselves; and

Whereas, our National Existence is based upon this principle, as recognized in the Declaration of Independence, "that all mankind are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; and

Whereas after the lapse[[3]](#footnote-3) of nearly sixty years, since the faith and honor of the American people were pledged to this avowal, before Almighty God and the World, nearly one-sixth part of the nation are held in bondage by their fellow citizens; and

Whereas, Slavery is contrary to the principles of natural justice, of our republican form of government, and of the Christian religion, and is destructive of the prosperity of the country, while it is endangering the peace, union, and liberties of the States; and

Whereas, we believe it the duty and interest of the masters immediately to emancipate their slaves, and that no scheme of expatriation,[[4]](#footnote-4) either voluntary or by compulsion,[[5]](#footnote-5) can remove this great and increasing evil; and

Whereas, we believe that it is practicable, by appeals to the consciences, hearts, and interests of the people, to awaken a public sentiment throughout the nation that will be opposed to the continuance of Slavery in any part of the Republic, and by effecting the speedy abolition of Slavery, prevent a general convulsion;[[6]](#footnote-6) and

Whereas, we believe we owe it to the oppressed, to our fellow citizens who hold slaves, to our whole country, to posterity,[[7]](#footnote-7) and to God, to do all that is lawfully in our power to bring about the extinction of Slavery, we do hereby agree, with a prayerful reliance on the Divine aid, to form ourselves into a society, to be governed by the following constitution:—

ART. I. This Society shall be called the AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY.

ART. II. The object of this Society is the entire abolition of Slavery in the United States. While it admits that each State, in which Slavery exists, has, by the Constitution of the United States, the exclusive right to *legislate* in regard to its abolition in said State, the Society shall aim to convince all our fellow-citizens by arguments addressed to their understandings and consciences, that Slaveholding is a heinous[[8]](#footnote-8) crime in the sight of God, and that the duty, safety, and best interests of all concerned, require its *immediate abandonment*, without expatriation.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Society will also endeavor, in a constitutional way, to influence Congress to put an end to the domestic Slave trade, and to abolish Slavery in all those portions of our common country which come under its control, especially in the District of Columbia,–and likewise to prevent the extension of it to any State that may be hereafter admitted to the Union.

ART. III. This Society shall aim to elevate the character and condition of the people of color, by encouraging their intellectual, moral and religious improvement, and by removing public prejudice, that thus they may, according to their intellectual and moral worth, share an equality with the whites, of civil and religious privileges; but this Society will never, in any way, countenance[[10]](#footnote-10) the oppressed in vindicating[[11]](#footnote-11) their rights by resorting to physical force.

ARTICLE IV. Any person who consents to the principles of this Constitution, who contributes to the funds of this Society, and is not a Slaveholder, may be a member of this Society, and shall be entitled to vote at the meetings.

Citation: “Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” Teaching American History, accessed 15 April 2020, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/constitution-of-the-american-anti-slavery-society/>

1. Background information gathered from “Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” *InfoUSA*, Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State, 5 Nov. 2011 <http://usinfo.org/docs/democracy/18.htm>. Annotations added by instructor. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Society quotes here from the Book of Acts, Chapter 17, verse 26 in the King James Bible (Acts 17:26). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Lapse* means gap or time interval. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Expatriation* means leaving one’s country to live elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Compulsion* means being forced to complete an action. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Convulsion* here means a violent social or political upheaval. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Posterity* means future generations [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Heinous* means utterly wicked or evil. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Again, *expatriation* means leaving one’s country to live elsewhere. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Countenance* here is a verb and means to approve or admit as acceptable. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Vindicating* here means providing justification or defense for an action. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)