

Charlie Lawing

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clawing@charlielawing.com
www.charlielawing.com

“I WILL NOT RETREAT A SINGLE INCH”
THE ABOLITIONISTS’ VOICE:
WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON
by Charlie Lawing

CHAPTER ONE--FROM POVERTY TO THE PRINTING PRESS

William Lloyd Garrison was born on December 12, 1805, in prosperous Newburyport, Massachusetts, a sprawling seaport community of wood plank houses and tall-steepled churches clustered about the briny wharves filling the mile-long inlet that spilled into the Merrimack River.

William's parents, Frances and Abijah, their four-year-old son James, two-year-old daughter Caroline, and infant "Lloyd"—as Frances affectionately called him—had moved to Newburyport from the smaller, less affluent seaport of St. John, seeking new opportunity in the booming metropolis whose bustling stone paved streets were lined with public markets, bookstores, and printing offices. Good fortune followed the close-knit family when, three years after Lloyd's birth, his parents were blessed with the arrival of daughter Elizabeth. The Garrisons' future seemed bright, overflowing with happiness, hope, and the promise of a better life. Little could they suspect that those warm, blue horizons would soon turn cold and so miserably gray.

Lloyd was only a toddler in 1808 when his "sailing-master" father abandoned the family, presumably to a life at sea. Abijah Garrison had once been a successful seafaring pilot, but fate dealt the old salt some bitter blows. President Thomas Jefferson's shipping embargo that severely curtailed maritime commerce, the heart-wrenching death of five-year-old Caroline, and

a mismatched marriage (Frances was a pious, outspoken foe of demon rum; Abijah squandered his meager earnings in waterfront saloons), provided more disappointment than the seaman could handle. Lloyd grew up never knowing his departed, wayward father.

Lloyd's stoic mother represented everything that Abijah did not. Frances Lloyd Garrison was a strong and devoutly religious woman. Though not well-schooled, Frances was quick-witted, and it was she from whom Lloyd was to inherit his gifted penmanship and unquenchable thirst for literature. With her deep, abiding faith, cheerful spirit, and stalwart work ethic, Frances remained throughout Lloyd's life his most influential role model.

Left nearly destitute to fend for herself and her three children, Frances found sporadic work as a practical nurse, tending to newborns and their mothers. During her absences, Lloyd, "Jemmy" (James's nickname), and Elizabeth were cared for by their mother's beloved friend and churchgoing companion, "Aunt" Martha Farnham.

When Lloyd grew a bit older, he and brother Jemmy sloshed through nearby riverbeds, digging for clams as airborne gulls dipped and soared like crying winged kites sailing through the clouds. To help supplement their toiling mother's income, the boys sold their harvest and sticks of mom's homemade molasses candy on the streets. The experience was humiliating to Lloyd who would never forget the sting of being ignored by apathetic strangers oblivious to the boys whose sustenance so often depended on the charity of others. Lloyd's embarrassment was further compounded when he and Jemmy had to fetch table leftovers from their mother's more generous employers, or soup from a town relief kitchen, suffering the merciless howls of kids who taunted the two, small brothers lugging the day's meal home in tin pails. Such assaults against a young boy's pride would have turned many into dispirited adolescents and embittered adults. But for Lloyd, the seeds of poverty and social ridicule nurtured a mature resolve: Never

would William Lloyd Garrison the man participate in nor tolerate the suffering of any fellow human being, especially those whose abominable plight required the most steel-willed compassion to conquer—the enslaved African American.

Lloyd's mother tried hard to keep her family intact. She insisted that Lloyd and Jemmy regularly attend worship services at the Baptist Church, where she prayed and sang hymns with a missionary zeal. His mother's enthusiasm was lost on the fidgety nine-year-old Jemmy. Lloyd, on the other hand, was profoundly moved by her spiritual devotion.

Yet, even as a mere five-year-old, Lloyd was not blind to the occasional hypocrite parading behind the pulpit. One Sunday morning, his mother wore a ruffle she had sewn to her dress to hide its fraying neckline. "We pray thee, O' Lord, to strip Sister Garrison of her Babylonish frills!" boomed the minister. Frances reddened, but took his rebuke in stride. Lloyd, however, was stunned to hear such cruel words hurled at his mother by a man of the cloth. He learned to question the sincerity of those who claimed to speak the gospel.

During the still of night on May 31, 1811, fire erupted through a stable roof on Merchants' Row. Carried on the dry, restless wind, flames rapidly engulfed the oldest and wealthiest sections of town. Lloyd would forever remember being held high, watching in horror and amazement as the blazing inferno that speared the black, smoky sky reduced Newburyport to cinders. By dawn's early light, two hundred and forty buildings, thirteen wharves, every dry goods store, the town library, and even the Baptist church were all demolished.

In 1812, before the seaport could gain a foothold in its climb from those ashes of economic ruin, battle with England broke out. By the winter of 1814, Frances Garrison could no longer sustain the dream of keeping her family together. Jemmy had grown rowdy; he had also reached working age. Thus, to apprentice him in the shoemaking trade and to seek more nursing work for

herself, Frances moved with Jemmy thirty miles south to Lynn, Massachusetts. Nine-year-old Lloyd, and six-year-old Elizabeth remained in Newburyport under Aunt Farnham's care.

Finding mostly low-paying household jobs in Lynn, Frances was unable to mail money, as promised, to help support her children. Aunt Farnham's only financial recourse was to send Lloyd to live with elderly Salome Bartlett and her deacon husband, Ezekiel, a woodcutter who soon taught the boy how to sharpen saws and chop firewood.

Lloyd attended classes at the big grammar school near the Newburyport courthouse. Sitting atop a hard slab bench, left-handed Lloyd endured much knuckle-rapping until finally learning to write, with his right hand, clear and beautiful script. Like most youngsters, Lloyd enjoyed his fair share of fun outside the classroom. He eagerly joined in wintertime snowball fights, and skated on the frozen river and ponds. In warmer months, Lloyd raced hoops barefooted through town, flew kites, and played ball games, marbles, and hopscotch. An excellent swimmer, he once gained local celebrity after accomplishing a long swim across the Merrimack to "Great Rock" and, pitted against the powerful tide, back again.

Unfortunately, the deacon Bartlett produced scant income. Lloyd's relatively carefree days ended abruptly when he had to quit school and start work alongside "Uncle" Bartlett, cutting and selling wood. Desperately unhappy, the boy tried, unsuccessfully, to run away. Fearing that he, like his father, would fall prey to the allure of the sea, his mother sent for Lloyd who, in 1815, gladly packed his belongings and set off for Lynn, where she found work for him, as she had for James, as a shoemaker's apprentice.

When Lloyd arrived in Lynn, he learned that his fourteen-year-old brother had developed a taste for "black strap" (rum sweetened with molasses) and had started carousing from tavern to tavern, drinking, brawling, and earning a foul reputation. After his reckless behavior finally cost

James his job, Frances Garrison decided to set sail with her two boys to Baltimore, Maryland, which was in 1815 the third largest American city.

Lloyd's mother had little difficulty finding nursing work in the metropolitan seaport whose population numbered close to sixty-thousand people. She secured clerking jobs for Lloyd and James at town merchants' stores, and before long was attending Baptist services every Sunday. Frances bragged that Lloyd, who would trek with his mother several miles to the church and back again, was "a fine boy," adding somewhat modestly, "though he is mine." Indeed, the unhappiness that had so disheartened Lloyd in Newburyport was now a fading memory, and it looked as if the small family had finally hit a streak of sweet fortune. Sadly, their luck quickly turned sour.

James discovered whisky, and resumed with a vengeance his wild drunken ways. After getting fired from a mounting number of clerking jobs, James, like the boys' father, Abijah, disappeared, likely into a life at sea. It was the last time Frances would ever see her eldest son. Perhaps his brother's dismal outcome prompted Lloyd to take stock of his own future. Lloyd cherished his mother's company, but she was frequently away at work, and, like before, he grew restless. He missed the easy familiarity of Newburyport, where he dreamed of returning to school. Thus in 1816, Salome and Ezekiel Bartlett welcomed Lloyd, sent with Frances Garrison's reluctant blessings, back to his cozy hometown.

Though Uncle Bartlett was still in no position to support the boy indefinitely, Lloyd could, at least for a while, return to classes. Setting his sights on learning a lifetime trade, Lloyd took an interest in carpentry. He was sent to nearby Haverhill to learn cabinet making, but quickly grew homesick. Before long, Lloyd was living under the Bartletts' Newburyport roof once again.

Young Lloyd wasn't quite so young anymore. He was almost a teenager, and the time had

come for him to find steady work. But what path could he take? One day, someone saw a “Boy Wanted” sign inside the office of the local newspaper. Lloyd enjoyed school and reading; perhaps working with words would suit the bookish adolescent. Uncle Bartlett paid a visit to Empraim W. Allen, the paper’s publisher and editor. Could Mr. Allen use a helping hand?

On October 18, 1818, Lloyd started his apprenticeship as a “printer’s devil” for the *Newburyport Herald*. William Lloyd Garrison had landed a trade that would serve him and his country for the rest of his life. America had landed a budding human rights crusader whose work would change the nation.

CHAPTER TWO -- THE APPRENTICE'S WORKSHOP

The *Herald* office in the heart of Newburyport was abuzz with activity—local merchants placing advertisements for their wares, attorneys publishing legal notices, and townsfolk who enjoyed topical conversation with the ever knowledgeable and civic-minded Ephraim Allen.

One of the most hotly discussed topics abuzz in young William Lloyd Garrison's ears was slavery in North America, which began, say some historians, with the landing of 20 Africans at Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. The English settlers, who wanted a cheap labor supply to grow crops for food and export, had learned they couldn't force Native Americans to work for them; the indigenous peoples were defiant, and, unlike the colonialists, at home in the wilderness.

However, while Native Americans were on their own land, and Europeans where in their own transplanted culture, Africans had been wrenched from their land and culture, making it easier for the settlers to exploit them; and, because of their skin color, enslaved African Americans who escaped could easily be recognized and recaptured.

Six years after their deportation to Jamestown, there were only 23 Africans in the whole colony of Virginia; but as large-scale plantation agricultural grew, so grew slavery. By 1754, the plantation system was so deeply rooted in Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia that over 36 percent of the population in those colonies were slaves; and by the eve of the American Revolution slaves represented 47 percent of Virginia's population.

By the mid-eighteenth century, every North American colony depended upon slavery. Though the lack of plantation society in the North made slavery different from that in the South, the Northern economy could not have grown so rapidly without the exploitation of enslaved African Americans in dairying, farming, lumbering, shipping, and other enterprises that required heavy labor. However, while enslaved African Americans in the Southern colonies were viewed as investments in capital and, in business dealings, were legally the same as animals, laws in New England recognized that enslaved African Americans were both property and human beings, who were afforded some of the same basic legal rights of white people.

Though overall treatment of enslaved African Americans in the far-Northern colonies was perhaps not as brutal as in the South, it was more cruel in the Middle colonies, where slaves were more plentiful. Many white slaveholders lived in fear of slave revolutions; therefore, the severity of abuse toward African Americans was often directly proportional to the size of any given slave population. Thus in 1750 New Hampshire, where black people numbered 550, slave laws were not as vicious as those in Virginia, where blacks numbered 101,452.

Because the institution of slavery was vile wherever it existed, North or South, antislavery sentiment in North America began the moment one enslaved African American arrived; the country's first abolitionists were the slaves themselves. White opposition to slavery arose from the desire to live in security, because of the economic competition of slave labor, and out of moral opposition to the degrading effects of slavery on society at large. By the mid-eighteenth century, most Quakers (a religious body, who espoused universal equality) renounced the slave trade, and had emancipated their slaves by the American Revolution. In the North, the lack of critical economic need for slaves, coupled with the human rights rhetoric of the Revolution (which, itself, created more free blacks), gradually led to the extinction of slavery.

Determined to uphold the sociopolitical ideals of the Revolution, early nineteenth-century antislavery societies grew concerned for black Americans; while slaveholders, equally determined to continue exploiting their cheap source of labor, vehemently defended the status quo. When Lloyd Garrison began his apprenticeship at the *Herald*, well-meaning abolitionists were already calling for gradual emancipation; but it would take another thirteen years, when he would launch his newspaper, *The Liberator*, for the era of immediate abolitionism to truly begin.

Twelve-year-old Lloyd felt overwhelmed by all that lay before him. Apprenticeships in 1818 New England were more than on-the-job training opportunities for young workers; they were legal arrangements that obligated employee to employer until their contract expired, typically (and in Lloyd's case) in seven years. Lloyd would be a twenty-year-old adult before his commitment to Ephraim Allen could be fulfilled.

Lloyd's daily tasks at the *Herald* were demanding. He kept the fireplace burning, swept the floor, and tended to the boiling kettle of oily printer's ink. The apprentice's first trade challenge was to learn type composition, whereby pieces of metal characters—each a capital or lower case letter, numeral, or ornament—were set one-by-one and line-by-line into a shallow wooden “galley” tray, the width and length of which equaled one full newspaper page.

Lloyd agonized over developing the craftsmanship required to arrange the inverted type into pages of words, sentences, and paragraphs. Though it seemed to him that he “never should be able to do anything of the kind,” Lloyd quickly became an expert compositor.

Next came learning how to operate the press, no minor chore for wiry Lloyd who weighed considerably less than the 160 pounds required to pull its large wooden levers. However, the growing teenager was a fast and eager pupil, and before long became an excellent pressman.

Allen took an almost instant liking to Lloyd who grew fond of his employer. Not only had

the editor given Lloyd an opportunity to learn a stable and respectable trade, he had taken the boy into his and his wife's home, providing room, board, and an informal but thorough literary education. While the *Herald's* articles served as Lloyd's "textbooks" in grammar, composition, economics, and politics, fellow workers taught him Latin; and Tobias Miller, a journeyman printer who was also a Baptist missionary, taught the apprentice philosophy and theology.

Whenever circumstances got the better of Lloyd, in his easy reassuring manner, Miller would remind his young friend to take life's upsets in stride, because "it will all be the same in a thousand years." More than anything else, Miller showed the apprentice how to remain calm in the face of fierce adversity, an invaluable lesson that was to serve William Lloyd Garrison throughout his forty-year antislavery career.

Toby Miller so influenced him that Lloyd seriously considered becoming a missionary. Lloyd's mother would be so proud of her baby boy! But what of his newfound love for the printed word? Mr. Allen had insisted that a newspaper should "aspire to something higher." Perhaps the material and spiritual worlds could be bridged. Maybe journalism, as Lloyd would discover, could be the vehicle "for disseminating literary, moral and religious instruction."

With the spring that followed Lloyd's sixteenth birthday arrived a new ambition: Dissatisfied with merely composing type for other people's words, he longed to break into print. After reading an account of a young woman's successful breach-of-promise suit against a Boston dandy, Lloyd disguised his handwriting and penned a tongue-in-cheek essay ridiculing the verdict, signed the piece "An Old Bachelor," and slipped it under Mr. Allen's door. Allen, who enjoyed the anonymous essay, handed the manuscript to an astonished Lloyd, with instructions to set it up. On May 21, 1822, the novice writer flushed with pride upon seeing his first words in print.

For most of that year, Lloyd continued writing essays from “A.O.B.,” and his employer printed them all. One day, after reading a notice in the paper from Allen inviting A.O.B. to meet with the editor, Lloyd sheepishly revealed the author’s true identity. Much to Lloyd’s surprise, Allen promoted the apprentice to shop foreman, and encouraged Lloyd to keep submitting his work to the *Herald*. The teen was overjoyed. But sadness soon dampened his spirits.

Back in Baltimore, Frances Garrison was suffering from tuberculosis. Lloyd’s younger sister, Elizabeth, whose fare from Newburyport to Baltimore Aunt Farnham had paid, died a victim of the same disease in her mother’s arms in September 1822. Letters that Lloyd received from Frances revealed that her rapidly deteriorating health was equally critical. His mother begged Lloyd to pay her one final visit.

By July 1823 when Lloyd arrived in Baltimore, nearly seven years had elapsed since either had seen the other. Frances Garrison could barely recognize her son. The bony, eleven-year-old boy she had sent to live with the Bartletts in 1816 had matured into a handsome, well-mannered, and articulate seventeen-year-old gentleman who carried himself with poise and grace.

Lloyd, however, beheld a bedridden ghost of his formerly vital mother. “I found her in tears,” he wrote to Ephraim Allen, “—but, O God, so altered, so emaciated, that I should never have recognized her, had I not known that there were none else in the room.”

Lloyd remained by his feeble mother’s bedside for three weeks, until editor Allen could no longer afford his shop foreman’s absence. Lloyd finally tore himself away, mother and son both aware that neither would ever see the other again.

In September 1823, less than a month after his return to Newburyport, the sad news arrived. Lloyd solemnly readied the presses for his mother’s obituary. Frances Lloyd Garrison had lived only forty-five difficult years, and her death pierced Lloyd’s heart. Years later he

would confess, “I always feel like a little boy when I think of Mother.”

Nonetheless, “Lloyd,” the “little boy,” who had lost his father and brother to drink and the sea, two sisters and his mother to disease and the grave, became “William,” the man-about-town, who, as one acquaintance noted, “was quite popular with the ladies,” whom he accompanied on lazy summer picnics and wintry moonlit sleigh rides.

William also enjoyed the mental exhilaration of participating in fiery, public debates. Bringing together a group of young gentlemen friends, who, like himself, were devoted to intellectual and moral self-improvement, William formed the Franklin Debating Club, and, in 1824, made the club’s Fourth of July Address. Club members were so impressed with William’s eloquent oration that they took up a collection to pay for its publication.

Not only was William solidly establishing himself as a masterful worker of words on both page and stage, he was also creating his public persona. Some recognized William as an “attractive youth, unusually dignified in his bearing for so young a man.” Others remembered him as an “exceedingly genteel young man,” who was always neatly and “elegantly dressed.”

Though he wasn’t a tall fellow, William’s erect posture telegraphed an inflexible personality that commanded attention. He had a long, narrow face beneath a full head of healthy brown hair. With thin, stretched lips, a firm jaw, and silver spectacles bridging his prominent nose, William’s appearance was that of an uncompromisingly severe, yet sincere, young man with whom anyone who dared challenge his convictions most assuredly must reckon.

To many who knew him, William seemed overly self-righteous and prudish; however, his piety was no mere show. William could consciously, and successfully, cultivate his image as a true Christian soldier, because he wholeheartedly embraced the deep-seated Biblical ideals that Frances had planted in Lloyd’s fertile, young brain.

William Lloyd Garrison truly believed that every internal and external, individual and social manifestation of evil could be exorcised in name of the Lord; and in time, he would give his all to prove it.

CHAPTER THREE -- THE YOUNG EDITOR

In December 1825, twenty-year-old William Lloyd Garrison's seven-year apprenticeship to Ephraim Allen formally expired. He continued working at the *Herald*, but William—determined to make his mark as a bona fide American journalist—dreamed of starting his own newspaper.

In March 1826, his dreams came true. With a loan from Mr. Allen, William purchased from a friend and fellow Franklin Club member, Isaac Knapp, a weekly paper that William renamed the *Newburyport Free Press*.

As America celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence in July 1826, William, now the youngest editor and publisher in the United States, criticized in his *Free Press* the moral timidity of his fellow patriots who bestowed Fourth of July “rhapsodies upon the deeds of our fathers,” while scores of innocent American men, women, and children remained imprisoned in chains. “There is one theme that should be dwelt upon till our whole country is free from the curse,” wrote William, “—it is SLAVERY.”

During her years in Baltimore when Frances Garrison was so gravely ill, she had written to her son about an enslaved African-American woman named Henny, who had sympathetically taken care of William's mother. “Although a slave to man,” Frances wrote of her caregiver, “yet a free-born soul by the grace of God.”

Thus had William's mother years ago taught him that slavery was an ungodly sin. Yet, when in 1826 he published his first major public condemnation of America's slave system, though he found slavery morally reprehensible, William was not then aware that, within two years, he would devote his life's future work to slavery's demise.

William was quite aware, however, that he had forged for himself a memorable editorial identity—that of an abrasive social agitator who thrived on controversy; a style that came not without a price. William drove away so many subscribers that, after only six months at its helm, he put the *Free Press* up for sale. Though his first publishing venture was short lived, William Lloyd Garrison had found his voice and his calling.

Boston, Massachusetts in 1826 had a population of nearly sixty-thousand people. Ten times larger than Newburyport, Boston represented the heart and soul of intellectual New England, and was the undisputed capital of America's printing industry. Thus, one frosty December morn, William caught a stagecoach to seek opportunity in the old colonial town, and, at the age of twenty-one, left his boyhood world behind.

William roomed in Boston at a boardinghouse run by the Reverend William Collier, a Baptist preacher and editor of a struggling temperance newspaper—the *National Philanthropist*. After increasing debt, Reverend Collier sold the publication to Nathaniel White, who offered William Garrison a job as the paper's new editor. In January 1828, William resumed his place in the editor's chair with his customary enthusiasm. William did not, however, restrict himself to the temperance cause; he promoted peace, cursed war, and attacked religious infidelity.

On St. Patrick's Day in 1828, William was introduced to Benjamin Lundy, a gentle, New Jersey Quaker, who, with a group of Boston ministers, had gathered that evening at Collier's boardinghouse to discuss the idea of forming a local antislavery society. William hung on

Lundy's every word as the Quaker told of his shock and revulsion, when, in Wheeling, Virginia, he saw fellow human beings chained in slave pens, awaiting shipment to the South.

The horrific sight prompted Lundy to launch in 1821 his journal, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, calling for gradual emancipation and advocating the colonization of released African Americans to the republic of Haiti. By the time William Garrison and Benjamin Lundy met, the latter had walked and ridden horseback on a one-man antislavery tour through nineteen of the twenty-four existing states, and had organized fifty antislavery societies in North Carolina, eight in Virginia.

But now in Massachusetts, where slavery had been abolished in the 1780s, and where most believed that the vices of slavery were best left for Southern states to address without “meddling” from the North, Lundy found only two of the men assembled before him interested in his cause.

One was a young Unitarian minister, Samuel Joseph May from Brooklyn, Connecticut, the only religious leader willing to consider Lundy's proposal; and the other was William Garrison, who not only applauded the plan, but was emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually reborn. He would always remember that fateful day when Benjamin Lundy, William declared, “opened my eyes” and “inflamed my mind,” and William Lloyd Garrison became a wholly converted apostle to the antislavery crusade.

On July Fourth, William resigned his post at the *Philanthropist*, and was soon eagerly at work helping Lundy organize public meetings, and inviting Bostonians to join the antislavery cause. Few New Englanders, however, were willing to risk agitating Southern slaveholders by getting publicly involved in the two missionaries' plans. “My soul was on fire,” William remarked, when he encountered the “moral cowardice” which seemed to grip the city. Lundy set

off with his reform plans toward New York, and William bade his mentor and friend a fond farewell. Boston's conversion, it appeared, would have to wait.

Before the month was out, a group of town fathers from Vermont, who hoped to get President John Quincy Adams reelected in the '28 campaign, approached William Garrison. Would he be interested in editing a pro-Adams weekly newspaper? William jumped on the offer. He moved to Bennington, Vermont, and, on October 3, 1828, the first issue of William's *Journal of the Times* appeared. But if Adams's proponents had dreamed that supporting his reelection would be William's main editorial concern, they were in for a quick awakening. "Before God and our country," wrote William, "we give our pledge that the liberation of the enslaved African shall always be uppermost in our pursuits." When Benjamin Lundy called on William to join him in late July or early August '89 as coeditor of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, William published in the *Journal* his farewell; and, in April 1829, returned to Boston to await Lundy's formal summons.

In June, the American Colonization Society (ACS) invited William to deliver the annual Fourth of July address at Boston's Park Street Church. "My very knees knock together at the thought of speaking before so large a concourse," William confessed. He would possibly quell those fears; but could William overcome his ambivalence toward the ACS itself?

Founded in 1817, the American Colonization Society—which, like Benjamin Lundy, advocated gradual emancipation—raised money to buy enslaved African Americans and resettle them in a permanent Liberian colony. Initially, William thought that the colonization operation took adequate steps toward dismantling slavery. But after reading a pamphlet written by the Reverend George Bourne, William harbored grave doubts.

Reverend Bourne insisted that, because slavery was immoral and against God's law *now*,

believers in the Bible must also believe in *immediate* emancipation. Could Brother Lundy and the ACS both be mistaken? Was “gradualism” (the view that enslaved African Americans should be liberated incrementally over an indeterminate length of time), by practice, a sin?

On Saturday, July Fourth, 1829, Park Street Church, which could easily seat 1,500, was packed. William, “of quite a youthful appearance, and habited in a suit of black, with his neck bare, and a broad linen collar spread over that of his coat,” mounted the rostrum and gazed out upon a buzzing throng of prominent editors, clergymen, and antislavery advocates. William had spent more than a week preparing his lecture for the occasion, but when he started to speak, his “remarks were rendered inaudible by the feebleness of his utterance . . .”

Perhaps the twenty-three-year-old budding abolitionist then recalled the occasion three years earlier when he criticized in his *Free Press* the timidity of other Fourth of July orators, for his emotions took an observable turn. As William advanced, wrote one reporter from the crowd, “his voice was raised, his confidence was regained,” and he unleashed a powerful statement of American egalitarian principle, which established the foundation of almost every argument that William would use henceforth.

“Every Fourth of July, our Declaration of Independence is produced, with a sublime indignation, to set forth the tyranny of the mother country,” William began. “But what a pitiful detail of grievances does this document present, in comparison with the wrongs which our slaves endure! . . . I am ashamed of my country. I am sick of our unmeaning declamation in praise of liberty and equality; of our hypocritical cant about the unalienable rights of man.”

The growling orator was equally disgusted with what he characterized as America’s apathetic clergy. “What has Christianity done, by direct effort, for our slave population?” William asked. “The blood of souls is upon her garments, yet she heeds not the stain. The

clankings of the prisoner's chains strike upon her ear, but they cannot penetrate her heart."

William then called for all free States "to demand a gradual abolition of slavery, because, by its continuance, they participate in the guilt . . ." To him, there were no subtle shades of gray clouding the topic of slavery; every issue could clearly be seen, figuratively and literally, in terms of black and white. "Suppose that, by a miracle, the slaves should suddenly become white," William roared. "You would say . . . they ought immediately to be set free."

William's was not the language of moderation with which the American Colonization Society had grown so comfortable. He had unmasked the hypocrisy of a citizenry allowing slavery to exist in a country founded upon freedom and equality; the failure of Christian churches and societies to combat slavery in God's name; and the responsibility for slavery that fell upon the nation's shoulders in the North, as well as in the South. William closed his two-hour assault with a prophetic admonition:

"I will say, finally, that I despair of the republic while slavery exists therein." If America's "own vices are too strong for us," William asked, "how, in addition to these, shall we be able to contend successfully with millions of armed and desperate men, as we must eventually, if slavery do not cease?"

When it was all over, William knew that he had delivered an astonishing performance. But as the weeks rolled by, it grew equally evident that his sermon had inspired no immediate antislavery activity in Boston. Had William demanded too much from his listeners?

When, at last, Benjamin Lundy's official call came in mid-August, William was ready to set sail. By the time William boarded the vessel bound for Baltimore, Maryland, he had answered his own question:

William Lloyd Garrison hadn't demanded too much. He had demanded too little.