"I Will Be Heard!"

An angry mob dragged William Lloyd Garrison through the streets of Boston. They put a rope around his neck. They wanted to hang him. But the mayor of Boston was able to stop the mob just in time. He put Garrison in jail for a while to protect him. The date was October 21, 1835.

Why did the mob want to hang this man? Because he ran a newspaper that was very strongly against slavery. It was called The Liberator.

Slavery had never taken hold in the North the way it had in the South. And by this time all the Northern states had passed laws against slavery. But many white Northerners discriminated against black Americans. That is, they looked down upon black people and mistreated them in certain ways. Still, few Northerners defended slavery. Many hoped that slavery would die away in the South by itself. Or they thought that the government might be able to get rid of it slowly, step by step.

William Lloyd Garrison was not willing to wait. He wanted slavery in the South ended right away. He fought against slavery day and night.

There were many people in the North

By the early 1800's, some Northern towns and cities were setting up separate schools for blacks. But many whites opposed this idea. In the 1830's, from Connecticut to Ohio, mobs attacked such schools.
who did not like Garrison. They said he was a troublemaker. If people in the South wanted slavery, they said, that was the Southerners' business. Many workers in the North were afraid they would lose their jobs if the slaves were freed. The blacks, they said, would work for less money. And there were factory-owners and other business leaders in the North who made their money from cotton. They did not want to see an end to slavery, either.

Target of mobs.

So Northern mobs often attacked people who were in the movement against slavery. The people who wanted to end slavery right away were called abolitionists. They were a favorite target of the mobs. Their lives were not safe. But Garrison — and other abolitionists — would not quit. Garrison was not afraid of anyone. Nothing could make him stop writing and talking against slavery. When he started his newspaper, Garrison said:

"I am in earnest. I will not excuse [anyone]. I will not retreat a single inch. And I will be heard!"

Garrison made many enemies by taking

*William Lloyd Garrison led the fight against slavery. He was hated and widely resented.*
a stand like this. He also won many friends. And he lived to see the day when slavery was ended in the United States.

William Lloyd Garrison was born in a small town near Boston in 1805. His father drank very heavily and left the family when William was three years old. Many times as a boy William had to beg for scraps of food. Many times he went hungry.

When he was nine, William had to leave school and go to work. After a while, he became a printer's helper on a newspaper. William liked good writers. He read their books at night. When he was only 17, he began to write articles for the newspaper.

Later Garrison became the editor of a Baltimore newspaper that was against slavery. He could not understand the American people of his time. They were very proud of the Declaration of Independence which said, "All men are created equal." Yet they did not seem to care that millions of blacks were slaves.

"I am ashamed of my country," Garrison said.

"No neutrals." In 1831 Garrison started his own paper, The Liberator, in Boston. He didn't pull any punches when he wrote against slavery. He called slavery "sinful." He thought the South wicked for supporting it. Many people -- even some who were against slavery -- did not like Garrison's strong language. One minister said that Garrison did not write "like a Christian gentleman." Garrison did not care. "Men shall either like me or dislike me. There shall be no neutrals," he said.

In 1833 Garrison also started one of the first groups to fight against slavery. It was called the American Anti-Slavery Society. Many people laughed at it at first. But by 1840 it had about 200,000 members.

Garrison kept up his attack on slavery with full force. While in jail in Boston in October 1835, he wrote these lines on the wall of his cell: "Keep me as a prisoner, but bind me not as a slave. Punish me as a criminal, but hold me not as a chattel [slave]. Torture me as a man, but drive me not like a beast."

At home, Garrison was a kind husband and father. Some people were amazed when they met him for the first time. They thought he would be as outspoken as his newspaper articles.

Garrison did not think that force was the way to end slavery. He was against war. He thought slavery should be ended by peaceful means. But when the Civil War broke out, Garrison gave his support to President Lincoln and the North.

In 1865 slavery was ended everywhere in the United States by the 13th Amendment. Garrison then stopped printing The Liberator. The battle he had fought for more than 30 years was won.

A Second Look...

1. What were William Lloyd Garrison's views on slavery? Why did they annoy many Southerners? Why did they frighten some white Northerners?

2. Who are some people today who remind you of William Lloyd Garrison? What is it about them that seems similar to Garrison?

3. Pretend that you are a slave-owner in Georgia in the 1830's. Write a letter to the editor of The Liberator telling him what you think of his newspaper. Then pretend that you are Garrison. How will you respond?