



Abolitionism in Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880)

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Lydia Maria Child's 1833 *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* was the first book-length condemnation of slavery published in the United States. In it, Child argues for the complete abolition of slavery on moral, political, and economic grounds. Unlike many discussions of slavery at the time, she includes descriptions of the torture and sexual exploitation of enslaved people. She offers historical sources proving that the moral and intellectual qualities of black Americans are equal to those of whites. She provides historical evidence that abolition will not result in insurrection. Child is especially critical of colonization, or the argument that freed blacks should be sent to Africa since white and black Americans will never live in peace. "Our prejudice against the blacks is founded in sheer pride," she writes. "We made slavery, and slavery makes the prejudice. No Christian, who questions his own conscience, can justify himself in indulging the feeling" (Child 1833: 141).

Against many of her fellow northerners, Child argues that the desire to preserve the union of the United States does not justify slavery's continuation: it is, she asserts, "an eternal truth that nothing good can be preserved by crime" (1833: 126). The evils of slavery, she concludes, admit of "no radical cure" other than its "utter extinction" (1833: 65). She ends *An Appeal* with a chapter exhorting her fellow northerners not to "flatter" themselves that they are better than their southern compatriots but to recognize and eradicate their own racial prejudice (1833: 208). Child's position was radical enough that she suffered social ostracism and financial privation for expressing these views. She nevertheless went on to write several other abolitionist works, including *The Evils of Slavery, and the Cure of Slavery, The Anti-Slavery Catechism*, and *The Right Way, the Safe Way*.

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