

# “The Abolition Meeting”

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An article from  
The Oswego Palladium  
Wednesday  
June 15, 1842

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## Oswego County

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On Thursday last, according to previous notice, our citizens were entertained with a statement of doctrines, purposes and prospects of the abolitionists.

The meeting in the afternoon was held in the Market Hall, was respectably attended, and addressed by Messrs. Gerrit Smith and J. C. Jackson

The object of this meeting was undoubtedly entirely political. The whole aim of the eloquent speakers seemed to be to enlist in behalf of their cause, as far as possible, the active political exertions of the community; and those who would not engage as laborers in the work of extending abolition doctrines, and the

political advancement of abolition leaders, thro’ the ballot boxes, were entreated, at least, to remain neutral, and abstain from expressing any opinions, or doing any acts calculated to retard the spread of abolition principles; especially, to withhold their votes from all who would not faithfully and fully represent and carry out those principles in office. Now, though we would not make the slightest objection to the doings of those who having beatrode abolitionism as a hobby, in the days of its youthful vigor, now seek to invigorate its languid and emaciated frame so far as to enable it to deposit them in safety of the goals upon which they have fixed their eyes and hearts, for the malicious purpose of thwarting the plans which their overweening hopes may have led them to adopt; still we feel obliged to write a few paragraphs upon some of the doctrines

with which the abolitionists seek to support their cause.

All intelligent and candid men, we believe, now admit, that there is no power in the general government, or *without the states of the union where slavery exists*, which can act upon that institution within those states to the extent of effecting its abolition. The influence, therefore, which northern abolitionists must exert upon the wide and populous region where slavery exists for the attainment of their professed objects, is moral persuasive, and not compulsory and political. The southern states are therefore the appropriate theatres of their political efforts; for political action in N. York cannot effect the abolition of slavery in any one of the southern states, any more than it can mitigate the horrors of English slavery in her Indian territories, or within the boundaries of England herself. The invocations of northern

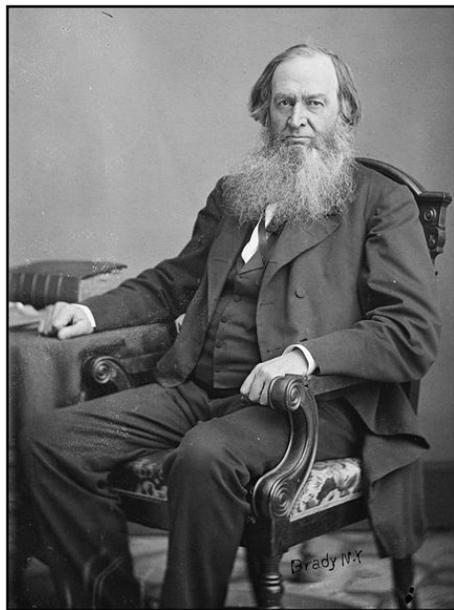
abolitionists for political power, up on the pretence that its exercise in their hands will lead to the extinction of slavery thro’out the Union, smacks a little, as it seems to us, of the insincerity and trickery of mere demagogueism. So far from the efforts thus far made by the abolitionists, having been, in any respect, beneficial to the slave, either in mitigating the severity of his bondage, or in hastening the period of his emancipation, we think they have been highly detrimental to him in both these respects. The slave is now bound to his lot by severer laws throughout the whole south, and the master far less accessible upon this subject than was the case before the abolitionists sought to obtain political preferment at the north by abusing and vilifying the south. Men, not the subject to our power, are seldom won by abuse to embrace and act upon our opinions. Nor do we think the southern

slaveholder, who alone has the power to manhunt his slaves, will do this any the sooner for the extravagant and insulting abuse of a faction, which is so ready to pour upon him the phials of its unstinted wrath. We do not dispute the truth of the remark made by Mr. Smith, in his evening lecture, that the abolition feeling at the north is not now as wide spread, or as deep, as it was half a century ago; nor do we think it would be difficult to assign the true cause of this charge.

New topics of discussion are apt to be listened to with some attention, and men are always excitable upon matters that affect their interests, or even their feelings, if those matters are under their control. The abolitionists may no doubt succeed in awakening a warm and we admit, a very commendable sympathy in behalf of the slave, by depicting his degradation, and his real or imaginary sufferings; but when they admit that the institution of

slavery in the southern states is protected by laws which northern votes cannot reach, without a violation of our national compact, northern voters will hardly consent, in exercising the right of suffrage, to vote solely with reference to the theories of the abolitionists, regardless of the important questions upon which perhaps depend their own most valued rights, and which they can control by their votes. Hence we do not doubt the truth of the complaint made by Mr. Jackson in his speech on Thursday, that “there are zealous and flaming abolitionists enough in the country throughout the whole year, excepting on the days of election, and then scarcely an abolitionist is to be found.” We trust that all northern men are opposed to slavery, though we hope few will become monomaniacs on that subject.

At the meeting above spoken of, a large number of pamphlets were distributed among the audience, containing “An Address to Slaves” in which we find the following passage: -- “And when, too, you are escaping



from the matchlessly horrible bastille, take all along your route, in the free as well as in the slave states, so far as is absolutely essential to your escape, the horse, the boar, the food, the clothing which you require; and feel no more compunction for the justifiable appropriation, than does the drowning man for possessing himself of the plank that floats in his way.” We regret that any association of men should have been found in this country, embodying as much reputed intelligence and integrity as the convention which adopted this address, who could consent to sanction a sentiment so repugnant to all law and morality, and injurious to the slave, and we must add, so disreputable to themselves as this. There is not probably, a state in the Union, in which the act which the fugitive slave is here advised to commit, would not constitute larceny, and consign both him and the free white man who should aid, abet, or advise him in the commission of the offence (sic), to the infamy and horrors of a confinement in a state prison. We sincerely hope that no abolitionist

will ever act, in any specific case, upon the doctrine thus recommended. What right, either legally or morally, we would ask, has the slave, or any other person, though injured by one man, to retaliate that injury upon, or enforce compensation therefore, from another and entirely innocent person?

A vindication of this address, written by Mr. Gerrit Smith, accompanies it, and we are almost as much surprised at his unsatisfactory attempt to justify this advice, as at the address itself. He says, “You shoot down the kidnapper, who is closely pursuing you, to reduce you to perpetual slavery. Would conscientious scruples restrain you from jumping on his horse to promote your escape from those, who espouse and follow up his purpose?”

Aside from the unfairness of this annulling the valid and constitutional laws under which slaves are held at the South, and thus sinking the slave-holder to the

level of the “kidnapper” who acts in violation of all law, the cast supported by Mr. Smith bears no analogy to the one it is intended to illustrate and justify. In the latter the fugitive slave is directed to take the property not only of his master, but of any other person, either in the free or slave states; while in the former, Mr. Smith only allows you to shoot your kidnapper, or escape on his horse.

But, we hope it is unnecessary to give any proof of the danger of inculcating doctrine that nay man may take as much of his neighbors property as he may consider necessary to supply his wants, beyond the naked statement of the proposition itself, and as we have already surpassed the intended limits of this article, we will bid the abolitionists a good night.

### Questions regarding the article:

1. Who were the speakers at the meeting in Market Hall?
2. What was the purpose of this meeting?
3. What did Gerrit Smith suggest slaves should do when escaping the south?
4. What would happen to a free white man if found to have helped a fugitive slave?
5. Why does Gerrit Smith equate a slave holder to a “kidnapper”?

IMAGE: Gerrit Smith, (Mathew Brady photograph taken between 1855 and 1865). This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or less.

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## **Questions for further research and discussion:**

1. The article suggests that northern abolitionists must convince slave states to abolish slavery based on morality, rather than it be compulsory or political. Why?
2. Gerrit Smith made a comment that “the abolition feeling at the north is not now as wide spread, or as deep, as it was half a century ago”; is there something that happened over that 50 years that lessened the abolition movement?
3. Did this meeting take place in Oswego? Where is Market Hall?
4. Mentioned in the meeting was that the northern vote didn't reflect the abolition sentiments. Research the voting structure and results during the Abolition years and determine the validity of this statement. (Voting structure: who could vote, was the electoral system in place, etc.)
5. What impact does Gerrit Smith have on the author of the article when he equates a slave holder to a “kidnapper”? How does it have an impact on Smith's message?