

# The Untold Story of Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin from 1840 to 1861

When discussing the abolitionist movement in the United States, often the focus is on key states such as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, or even Ohio. However, one state that played a significant role in the fight against slavery during the mid-19th century is often overlooked - Wisconsin. Political abolitionism in Wisconsin from 1840 to 1861 had a profound impact on the national discourse surrounding slavery and set the stage for the Civil War.

## The Rise of Political Abolitionism

In the early 1840s, the abolitionist sentiment started to gain traction in Wisconsin. A combination of factors, including the influx of settlers from anti-slavery states and the influence of prominent abolitionist newspapers, led many Wisconsinites to question the morality and legality of slavery. The state's unique geographical location, situated above the Mason-Dixon Line but adjacent to slave-holding territories, made it an ideal battleground for the abolitionist cause.

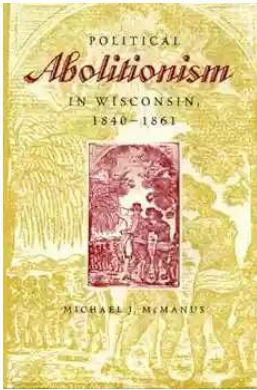
Political organizations advocating for the abolition of slavery began to emerge, with the founding of the Wisconsin Anti-Slavery Society in 1842. The society aimed to promote anti-slavery sentiments within the state's political landscape and actively participated in elections to ensure the election of anti-slavery candidates. As the movement grew, so did its influence on Wisconsin's political structure.

## Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin: 1840-1861

by Michael J McManus(Kindle Edition)

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English



File size	: 2054 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 359 pages



## Key Figures of Wisconsin Abolitionism

Several influential figures played a pivotal role in advancing the cause of abolitionism in Wisconsin. Among them, Sherman M. Booth, editor of the abolitionist newspaper "The Free Democrat," stood out as a vocal advocate for emancipation. He fearlessly used his platform to disseminate anti-slavery propaganda and expose the injustices perpetuated by the institution of slavery.

Luther H. Blackman, another prominent abolitionist, served as the president of the Wisconsin Anti-Slavery Society. Blackman played a vital role in organizing political conventions, public meetings, and rallies to raise awareness about the horrors of slavery and rally support for the anti-slavery cause.

Lyman Goodnow, a respected lawyer and politician, was one of the few elected officials in Wisconsin who publicly supported abolitionism. Goodnow's political influence helped shape legislation aimed at mitigating the impact of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 within the state.

## Resistance and Opposition

While political abolitionism in Wisconsin gained momentum, it faced strong opposition from pro-slavery advocates, particularly those with economic interests tied to the institution. Slaveholders in neighboring territories, as well as pro-slavery settlers within the state, actively campaigned against the abolitionist movement, often resorting to violence and intimidation to suppress the voices of dissent.

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 further intensified the division between pro and anti-slavery factions. The act mandated the return of escaped slaves to their owners and required citizens to assist in their capture. Wisconsin abolitionists, vehemently opposing the law, organized protests and actively resisted its implementation within the state.

## **The Republican Party and Political Shifts**

The formation of the Republican Party in the mid-1850s provided a platform for anti-slavery advocates in Wisconsin. The party, united by its opposition to the expansion of slavery into new territories, gained significant support within the state. As Wisconsin Republicans grew in numbers, they increasingly championed abolitionist causes and pushed for legislation to restrict slavery within the state.

Notably, Wisconsin became the first state in the Union to pass a law, in 1858, preventing the return of fugitive slaves. This law, known as the "Bashford Law," effectively nullified the reach of the Fugitive Slave Act within Wisconsin's borders and solidified the state's status as a bastion of anti-slavery sentiment.

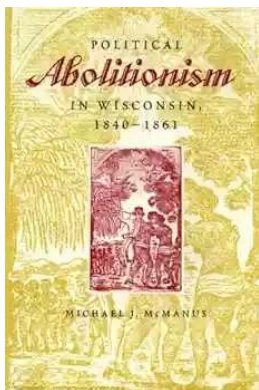
## **The Legacy of Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin**

The impact of political abolitionism in Wisconsin extended far beyond the state's borders. Politicians and activists from other states looked to Wisconsin as a model for organizing effective anti-slavery campaigns. The state's commitment to

the abolitionist cause helped mobilize support across the nation and ultimately influenced the outcome of the 1860 presidential election.

Furthermore, Wisconsin's unwavering stance against slavery set the stage for the state's contributions to the Union war effort during the Civil War. Thousands of Wisconsin soldiers fought against the institution of slavery on the battlefields, standing up for the values of freedom and equality that were central to political abolitionism.

Political abolitionism in Wisconsin from 1840 to 1861 played a crucial role in shaping the national discourse surrounding slavery. The perseverance and dedication of Wisconsin abolitionists, along with their successful political strategies, changed public opinion and paved the way for future anti-slavery legislation. Their efforts remind us that even in the face of adversity, a committed group of individuals can drive meaningful change and challenge deeply ingrained systems of injustice.



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Michael J. McManus's study of political abolitionism in Wisconsin demonstrates the overriding importance of slavery-related issues in bringing on the political crises of the 1850s and the American Civil War. In the years prior to the war, the political struggle to free enslaved blacks and block the peculiar institution's spread into the western territories became intertwined with concerns over the future of republican institutions in America and the liberties of northern Whites. Among Wisconsin's antislavery advocates, these issues produced growing disenchantment with the Union and the espousal of an extreme brand of state rights principles. It was only Lincoln's steadfast adherence to the Union, and the war itself, that finally led them to adopt the concept of a perpetual Union. Between 1848 and 1861, Wisconsin also held three separate statewide referenda on the question of Black suffrage, thus offering an excellent opportunity to evaluate the correlation between party rhetoric and voting behavior and the degree to which each of the three antislavery political parties was committed to racial equality. McManus shows that Wisconsin was more radical on slavery and race-related issues than most other northern states, and that slavery, rather than local ethno-cultural concerns, was of greatest significance to the state's voters in the prewar years.



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