



Abolition & Albert Gallatin

Throughout his life, Albert Gallatin was strongly opposed to slavery and made several attempts to have it abolished. After the slave revolt on the island of Haiti, Gallatin wrote to his friend Jean Badollet in 1793 that he believed the revolt to be the *natural consequences of slavery... the just punishment of the crimes of so many generations of slave traders and slave holders*. Gallatin expressed his opposition to slavery when he wrote to his wife Hannah in 1801 that they must prevent *the establishment and introduction of slavery into the middle states*. In 1809, as the nation continued its westward expansion, he declared that he *was and still am decidedly opposed to the introduction of slavery into any part of the Union where it does not exist or can be checked*.



During the course of his political career, Gallatin endeavored to put an end to slavery. In 1793, while in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, Gallatin was a member of a special committee that declared, *slavery is inconsistent with every principle of humanity, justice, and right, and repugnant to the spirit and express letter of the Constitution of this Commonwealth*. This committee's report also included a request for a bill that would forever abolish slavery in Pennsylvania. During this same time, Gallatin framed a report that stated slavery was *obviously contrary to the laws of nature*. After being elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1795, he continued to align himself with those trying to end slavery. When a bill setting up government in the Mississippi Territory was introduced in the House, an amendment was proposed that would have forever excluded slavery from all territory west of Georgia. Gallatin strongly supported this amendment. Unfortunately, the amendment ultimately failed.

As a member of the commission negotiating the end of The War of 1812 with Great Britain, Gallatin made another attempt to end slavery. As part of the peace treaty, the British proposed a clause that the two countries would do their best to abolish the slave trade. Gallatin readily agreed to the clause, which was eventually included in the treaty.

His anti-slavery sentiments were also part of his personal life, as he was a member of two early abolitionist organizations. On March 23, 1793, Gallatin joined *The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and For Improving the Condition of the African Race*. As of 1804, the *American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race* also counted Gallatin as a member.



The Gallatin family employed many servants, both Caucasian and African-American. These servants were not slaves, but were either employed on a monthly basis or were indentured servants who traveled with the Gallatin's to wherever the family was living. Peter, an African-American servant, went with Gallatin to Russia in 1813. Two African-American women, Beckey and Betsey, also worked for the Gallatin's as indentured servants. Although his wife Hannah disapproved of the personal conduct of these women, she felt very close to their children and frequently included news about them in her letters. In a letter dated February 25, 1825, Hannah wrote to the Gallatins' daughter, Frances, about Beckey and her son. *Beckey and her little Robert... are well, he is a fine child and crawls all about the kitchen.*



With one notable exception, Albert Gallatin never owned a slave. On April 29, 1824, he purchased a slave named Charlotte Smith in Maryland. Beforehand, however, he inquired about the process he would need to take to free her. He was informed that while laws in each state varied, a manumitted, or freed, slave must subscribe to a term of indenture. Once Gallatin purchased Charlotte, he immediately freed her. This required her to work for the Gallatins for nine years, the term of her indenture.

After Gallatin retired from political life, his attempts to abolish slavery continued. In 1844, the annexation of Texas was a hotly debated topic. One reason for this was if Texas was admitted to the Union, it would be a slave state. At the age of 84, Gallatin was persuaded to preside over an *Anti-Annexation Meeting* in New York. In his speech, he stated that if Texas was admitted, the South would gain *additional security*.



While he believed the Union should be preserved through compromise and concession, he pointed out that there was a limit as to what the North should be expected to grant. *It is too much to ask from us that we should take an active part in permitting the accession of a foreign state, and a foreign slave-holding state, to the Union; and that we should consent that new states should again be added to those upon an unequal basis of representation.* Gallatin did not want to interfere with slavery in Texas, as it was an independent state, but merely wanted to *preserve the present state of things* in the country.

At first, his speech was well received by the large audience, but eventually a rowdy group of pro-slavery demonstrators began shouting, interrupting Gallatin several times. He ultimately was able to complete his speech, which young John Jay, grandson of the Chief Justice and an abolitionist, claimed would have great influence *over the length and breadth of the land*.



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