

Elihu Embree

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Elihu Embree

Essential Question: What impact did Elihu Embree have on the abolition movement?

Elihu Embree was born in Pennsylvania and moved to Greene County, Tennessee in 1790. Embree and his brother took over the family's successful ironworks when his father moved to Ohio. Though raised a Quaker, as a young man Embree was a deist and slave owner. However, in 1812 Embree returned to his Quaker faith and became a leader in the anti-slavery movement. Embree freed the slaves he still owned and went so far as to repurchase members of a family who had been separated when he sold them. Embree then freed the family. According to Tennessee law, underage slaves could not be emancipated, so Embree was forced to retain ownership of a slave named Nancy and her four children until they were old enough to be freed. He set aside money in his will to educate the children. He also became a member of Tennessee's first antislavery society, The Tennessee Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves. The society was founded in 1815 by Charles Osborn at the Lost Creek Meetinghouse in Jefferson County. Manumission is the act of a slaveholder freeing his or her own slaves. Abolition refers to changing laws so that slavery is no longer legal.

The crisis over Missouri statehood prompted Embree and the Manumission society to begin publishing a newspaper to help spread the word about the anti-slavery movement. Embree edited and financed the *Manumission Intelligencer*, but the Society had final control over the publication. The financial Panic of 1819 hurt the paper, but Embree pressed on. Following the passage of the Missouri Compromise in 1820, Embree decided to launch his own paper over which he would have full control. The *Emancipator* served as a clearinghouse for information on antislavery meetings and publications throughout the country. Embree began with only six subscribers, but in six months the paper was serving 2,500 subscribers.

Embree's paper faced a number of challenges including Southern postmasters who refused to deliver the papers. Embree's finances had been badly damaged by the Panic of 1819 and an unsuccessful business arrangement. The publication costs of the *Manumission Intelligencer* had hurt his finances further. In his personal life, Embree was forced to deal with the death of his second wife just months after he began the newspaper. Embree was left with seven children to care for. The strain took its toll on Embree who died on December 4, 1820. He had only published seven issues of the *Emancipator*. After his death, Benjamin Lundy, a fellow Quaker and publisher, moved to Greeneville and began to publish his own anti-slavery newspaper. It would be followed ten years later by William Lloyd Garrison's famous *Liberator*. Embree recognized the need for anti-slavery groups throughout the country to share information

and created the *Emancipator* to fill that need. Embree's newspaper revolutionized the anti-slavery movement.

Sources: Biggers, Jeff. *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2006. Print.

“Elihu Embree.” Tennessee *Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. 1st edition. 1998. Print.

Elihu Embree

Use the information in the text to answer the questions below.

1. How did Elihu Embree show his dislike for slavery after he returned to the Quaker faith in 1812? _____

2. Why did Embree create the *Manumission Intelligencer*? _____

3. What challenges did the newspaper face? _____

4. What lessons can you learn from Embree's life? _____

Elihu Embree Key

Use the information in the text to answer the questions below. Answers will vary.

1. How did Elihu Embree show his dislike for slavery after he returned to the Quaker faith in 1812? Embree manumitted or freed the slaves he owned, repurchased and freed a family that had been separated when he sold them and promised to free other slaves when they were old enough. He also joined the Lost Creek Manumission Society, Tennessee's first anti-slavery society.
2. Why did Embree create the *Manumission Intelligencer*? Embree was upset by the controversy over Missouri's statehood and wanted to spread the word about abolition.
3. What challenges did the newspaper face? Embree nearly went bankrupt publishing it and Southern postmasters would not deliver it.
4. What lessons can you learn from Embree's life? Answers will vary.

Elihu Embree's *The Emancipator* Excerpts

Elihu Embree, a Quaker from Greene County TN, began publishing the nation's first abolitionist newspaper, The Emancipator in 1820. Embree published only seven issues of The Emancipator before his death in December, 1820.

THE EMANCIPATOR - 7th MONTH 31, 1820.

Sir: - I have lately understood by a report of the Joint Committee of both houses of our last Legislature, that there were some exceptions existing in that body, to your plan of a gradual emancipation, founded upon a notion of its lessening the value of that species of property: I have been thinking it was very well thought of, for, we ought to be very careful to take no step that would have a tendency to lessen the value of an immortal soul! And as I have vindicated the principle of emancipation in some communications to a correspondent, which he has been pleased to publish, I do not know whether I am not included in the same condemnation with your plans; I therefore set about drawing up my creed, which you may publish, if you please.

ARTICLE 1St. I believe in God the father Almighty, the maker of Heaven and Earth, the Seas, and all things that are therein.

2d. I believe in Jesus Christ the only begotten son of God the Father, and in the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son.

3d. I believe that God made of one blood, all nations of men to dwell upon the face of the earth, Acts 17, c. 26; and I believe that the Africans are of those nations.

4th. I believe that despotism, rapaciousness, and avarice, as flowing from the corrupt nature of man, are the sources from whence slavery originated, and that its continuance can be traced to no other fountain: So far I think I am orthodox, and if so,

5th. I believe slavery to be a species of idolatry; (for divine Revelation informs us that covetousness is idolatry,) I therefore believe that whoever has negroes, and covets to keep them in slavery, with all those who have them not, and yet covet to have them, are idolators.

6th. I believe that I am a profound ignoramus with regard to the source from whence any Legislature derived its authority to make Africans the property of Europeans, or Americans, unless it should be the sources referred to in the 4th article; and if these have led Legislatures to make black people the property of white people, I believe the same principle will, in a future day, prompt Legislatures to make the lower class of whites, the property of the higher classes, for there is nothing new, or, that step will make nothing new on the earth!

7th. I believe I have said, in my introduction, that it was very well thought of by the joint committee, not to lessen the value of such property as slaves are said to be; but I believe that the

number of negroes, be what they may in the possession of any member of the joint committee, or of both houses of the Legislature of this, or any other state, that they are property in the same point of view that a horse would be my property, which I had bought from a man who had stolen him. Of course then, I believe, if the law of God, the law of nature, and the law of nations, were admitted as evidence in favor of the negroes, they must be free; - well, what is next? why, if the owner of the horse comes and proves his property, I am done with it, I must seek redress of him from whom I got it; but I cannot find him, and all is lost! and I believe, that, according to the present existing laws of our country, the thief,

from whom I had procured this stolen property, ought to be hung until he is dead, dead, dead, (and says a poor negro) the Legislature who first made my countrymen slaves ought to share the same fate; and I am thinking whether it would not be right to say, Amen, for I believe it to be a worse crime to be a man - stealer, than to be a horse stealer!

But I am not done with what I shall call that happy thought of the joint committee, for I believe that whoever undervalues an immortal soul, and degrades human nature, and brings it down to a level with the brutes, must put but a very low estimate upon the atonement made by the Saviour of sinners.

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Source: Embree, Elihu. Ed. *The Emancipator, Elihu Embree in Jonesborough, Tenn 1820 July 3*. B.H. Murphey: Nashville, TN. University of Tennessee Special Collections Library, University of Tennessee, Web. 3 July, 2014.

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