

# Digital History

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## **Opposition to the Abolitionists** **Digital History ID 313**

Author: Elijah P. Lovejoy

Date: 1835

### **Annotation:**

The abolitionists mistakenly believed that the public--North and South--would easily embrace antislavery arguments. Having labored in earlier movements aimed at moral regeneration, the abolitionists assumed that they could swiftly persuade ministers and other community leaders that slavery was a moral evil. Instead, they encountered a harsh public reaction in both the North and South.

Mobs often led or instigated by "gentlemen of property and standing"--including many prominent bankers, judges, lawyers, merchants, and physicians--attacked the homes and businesses of abolitionist merchants, destroyed abolitionist printing presses, disrupted antislavery meetings, and attacked black neighborhoods. The reason: abolitionists represented a direct challenge to the authority of local elites, appealing beyond them to the young, women, and free blacks. Enraged by reports that abolitionists advocated racial amalgamation or intermarriage, convinced that they were dupes of a sinister British plot to undermine democracy, crowds pelted abolitionists with eggs and even stones. In view of such public anger and hostility, it is remarkable that more abolitionists were not killed or seriously injured.

On November 7, 1837, the abolitionist movement acquired its first martyr when an antiabolitionist mob in East Alton, Illinois (across from St. Louis) murdered the Reverend Elijah P. Lovejoy (1802-1837), an abolitionist editor and crusader against intemperance and "popery," after setting his printing presses on fire. In the following letter, Lovejoy refers to the hostility he encountered.

### **Document:**

As the "Pioneer" [a local newspaper] seems disposed to use language in reference to myself and my friends which I deem altogether uncalled for, and as I feel that, in my present situation, it is necessary I should, as far as may be, avoid all causes and occasions of irritation I must request that you will cease to send that paper to this office, as I have no wish to see it.

