



Freedom's Champion: Elijah Lovejoy

Paul Simon

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In this revised edition of his earlier biography, Paul Simon provides an inspiring account of the life and work of Elijah Lovejoy, an avid abolitionist in the 1830s and the first martyr to freedom of the press in the United States.

Lovejoy was a native New Englander, the son of a Congregational minister. He came to the Midwest in 1827 in pursuit of a teaching career and succeeded in running his own school for two years in St. Louis. Teaching failed to challenge Lovejoy, however, so he bought a half interest in the *St. Louis Times* and became its editor. In 1832, after experiencing a religious conversion, he returned east to study for the ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary. After his graduation, Lovejoy was called back to St. Louis by a group of Christian businessmen to serve as the editor of a new religious newspaper, the *Observer*, promoting religion, morality, and education. It was through this forum that Lovejoy took an ever stronger stance against slavery.

In the slave state of Missouri, such a view was not only unpopular, but in the eyes of many, criminal. As a result, Lovejoy and his family suffered repeated persecution and acts of violence from angry mobs. In July 1836, in hopes of finding a more tolerant community in a "free" state, he moved both his printing press and his family across the Mississippi River to Alton, Illinois.

The move to Alton was a fateful one. Lovejoy's press was dismantled and thrown into the river by a mob on the night of its arrival. Lovejoy ordered a new printing press, and it, too, was destroyed eleven months later. A determined and dedicated man, Lovejoy ordered a third press, and city officials took special precautions to ensure its safety after delivery. Nevertheless, an organized and angry mob rolled this third press, still in its crate, into the river exactly one month after Lovejoy's second press had been destroyed. A fourth press, housed in a large stone warehouse and guarded by Lovejoy and his supporters, met the same fate but only after a drunken mob had killed Lovejoy himself. He was buried two days later, 9 November 1837, on his thirty-fifth birthday. No one was ever convicted of his murder.

Rather than suppressing the abolitionist movement, Lovejoy's death caused an eruption of antislavery activity throughout the nation. At a protest meeting in Ohio, John Brown dedicated his life to fighting slavery, and Wendell Phillips emerged from a Lovejoy protest meeting in Boston to become a leader in the antislavery fight.

Simon defines Lovejoy's fight as a struggle for human dignity and the oppressed. He distinguishes Lovejoy as a courageous and admirable individual and his story as an important and enduring one for both the cause of freedom for the slaves and the cause of freedom of the press.

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