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#### THE LISTENING ABOLITIONIST

EARLY ABOLITIONISTS UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY were working toward a revolution. When the first antislavery movement began in 1787, slavery was perfectly legal and had been a stable and pervasive part of most societies for thousands of years. It was supported by religion and was a key part of national economies. Leaders assured populations of its legitimacy and importance. The argument was made again and again that slavery, like the turning of the seasons or the growing of crops, was simply part of the natural order of things. It is hard for us, people of the twenty-first century, to grasp this fundamental acceptance—the popular understanding that, like death and taxes, slavery was a permanent part of the human condition.

In trying to convey and justify the revolution of abolition, writers in the nineteenth century would sometimes point to a Bible verse that illustrated a world turned upside down. It spoke of the last days when things were to be made right and illustrated that transformation by stating, "In those days I will even pour out my spirit on my slaves, men and women, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:18 and Joel 2:29). The idea that slaves could have voices and use those voices in powerful ways was—and is often today—revolutionary. In the past, it was an idea so radical that it required the authority of a religious text in its support. Today, people still find it hard to hear the true and powerful voices of slaves. That is why Laura Murphy's careful attention to their words and stories is critically important.