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## Emancipation for Slaves or Emancipation for All: Women, Free Speech and the Abolition Movement

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African American abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass wrote that “when the true history of the anti-slavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages.”<sup>1</sup> Women were an integral part of the abolition movement. They were on the front lines, traveling the countryside—speaking on the issue of slavery, and yet, few realize that the abolition movement was the catalyst for change of another kind. As disagreeable as the issue of slavery was, there was a matter even more contentious for women, one that split the abolition movement down the middle, and it began over the issue of free speech. The maintenance of free speech was critical to the success of abolition, and it was the drive to deny free speech to women within the movement that ultimately harmed the antislavery crusade. Oddly, many of the staunchest abolitionists fought to suppress the right of women to speak, and ongoing struggle led women to question not only their role, but also their rights as integral members of society. As the contention over abolition grew, the struggle for free speech evolved into a struggle for equality. The abolition movement may have been the vehicle that ended slavery, but it was also the spark that ignited the debate about women and their own emancipatory claims. By discussing the abolition movement, this paper explores the efficacy of language and free speech as the foundation of the Women’s Rights Movement. Women shared parallel struggles to gain recognition in the Constitution, but had ‘unparalleled’ results, for while slaves received freedom (1865), citizenship (1868), and the vote (1870), women remained “fettered in chains.”<sup>2</sup>

The notion of women being fettered is not new. The domicile of a woman’s social position and the “ideology of inferiority” were brought to Colonial America from England.<sup>3</sup> Steeped in religious dogma, the “inferiority, wickedness, and necessary subjugation of woman was Catholic theology” with misogyny being derived from “Judaic and classical traditions.”<sup>4</sup> These traditions later influenced the view of women as being unfit for any vocation outside the

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass, an American Slave ; My Bondage and My Freedom ; Life and times of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1994), 907.

<sup>2</sup> Author note: The phrase ‘fettered in chains’ is a borrowed expression. It may have been a colloquialism of the time because it appeared in variations of this form throughout my research. However, since Thaddeus Stevens was the earliest reference discovered in the course of research, that source was used. The *Gettysburg Sentinel* reported that while attending dinner at the home of George Hersh, Thaddeus Stevens rose and made a declaratory toast “to the next President – May he be a freeman, who never riveted fetters on a human slave” (Thaddeus Stevens, “Independence Day Toast, July 4, 1823, in Gettysburg” printed in Beverly Wilson Palmer and Ochoa, Holly Byers, eds., *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens: Volume 1: January 1814 – March 1865*. [Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997], 5).

<sup>3</sup> Barbara J. Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

home and were an integral part of American social ideology, and it served to define the woman's role in a way that lived on well into the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Susan Estabrook Kennedy demonstrated tremendous profundity when she wrote, "America was not discovered for women."<sup>6</sup> This simple fact explains why men dominated the public sphere of colonial society. There was a sort of rough egalitarianism with women working in partnership with their husbands, although their influence was in the private 'domestic' sphere taking care of the home and yard, "laboring in [a] family economy," which produced the food, clothing, and shelter.<sup>7</sup> Barbara Harris referred to the "cult of domesticity," and was an ideology only "accessible to white and upper class women." This concept, also coined the "cult of true womanhood" based its ideals on four principal concepts:

[A] sharp dichotomy between the home and the economic world outside that paralleled a sharp contrast between female and male natures, the designation of the home as the female's only proper sphere, the moral superiority of the woman, and the idealization of her function as mother.<sup>8</sup>

Jeanne Boydston asserts that "particularly in the antebellum Northeast, the ideology of gender spheres was partly a response to the chaos of a changing society—an intellectually and emotionally comforting way of setting limits to the uncertainties of early industrialization."<sup>9</sup> It was the "mission of passive benevolence" where "men claimed social and political preeminence."<sup>10</sup> Particularly in the Puritan community, "for a woman to transgress the will and appointment of her husband, pastor, or magistrate was tantamount to transgressing the fifth commandment to honor one's father."<sup>11</sup>

Anne Hutchinson perhaps served as the cautionary tale of what happened to women who stepped outside the prescriptive gender norms. Having been raised in the dissenting tradition in her home in England, she fled to America to escape religious harassment. Once in Massachusetts, Hutchinson became a central religious figure in her own right. Initially, she led small prayer groups for women from her own home. However, when her activities attracted the attention of men and Hutchinson "assumed the role of religious instructor," Hugh Peter, minister of Salem First Church admonished "you have stepped out of your place, you have

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Estabrook Kennedy, *If All We Did Was to Weep at Home: A History of White Working Class Women in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>8</sup> Harris, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 143.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 152, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

rather bine a Husband than a Wife and a Preacher than a Hearers,” and charged Hutchinson with heresy for what was considered her subversive “antinomian theology.” She was banished from the colony and joined other dissenters in Rhode Island. Following the death of her husband, she moved to New York. She was killed during an Indian raid. It was not until nearly two hundred years later that the issues inherent to women and their structured roles would become prominent in political and social circles on a grand scale—over an even more contentious topic—emancipation.<sup>12</sup>

In 1831, abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison made a name for abolition when he fired off his first publication of his abolitionist paper *The Liberator*. He was radical in his thought processes and was clear in his avowal to remain steadfast and “be harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice,” but above all else, he wrote, “I WILL BE HEARD!”<sup>13</sup> His radical rhetoric garnered him no favor with whites who wanted him silenced. He and other prominent abolitionists faced ongoing threats from not only physical violence, but with arrest warrants and prison terms.<sup>14</sup>

In 1833, Garrison officially organized his abolitionist activities by forming the American Anti-Slavery Society of Pennsylvania (AASS), and women were among the earliest participants. Among the attendees was Hicksite Quaker and itinerant minister Lucretia Mott. Through her friendship with Garrison, she became a willing participant in his new “militant” organization. Garrison welcomed women’s participation believing in total equality without regard to race or gender. In recalling her first meeting with the AASS, Mott observed, “[while we] were not recognized as part of the convention by signing the document...every courtesy was shown to us, every encouragement to speak.”<sup>15</sup> She recognized that women were there by “sufferance,” but when she spoke, there

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<sup>12</sup> John A. Grigg ed., *British Colonial America: People and Perspectives* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008), 60-61. Linda K. Kerber et al., *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 25, 26, 71, 72; Stephen Feldman, *Free Expression and Democracy in America: A History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 12-13; Carol V. R. George, ed., “Remember the Ladies”: *New Perspectives on Women in American History Essays in Honor of Nelson Manfred Blake* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1975), 14.

<sup>13</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator*, No. 1 (January 1, 1831), printed in Arthur M. Merrill, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: Volume I: I Will Be Heard! 1822-1835* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), 119.

<sup>14</sup> John Jay Chapman, “William Lloyd Garrison” (1921) printed in Jacques Barzun, ed., *The Selected Writings of John Jay Chapman* (New York: Farr, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), Barzun, 20-21, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Lucretia Mott, “Seeking a Voice: Garrisonian Abolitionist Women, 1831-1833” *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters*, Anna Davis, ed. (1884) printed in Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Women’s Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830 - 1870: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 77.

was an acceptance and “readiness with which the freedom to speak was granted,” and it was an inspiration to her.<sup>16</sup>

When she heard men discuss their ideas, Mott was initially reticent to speak, but as she gained confidence, she spoke up and made the suggestion to “transpose” the order of some of the language. She recalled that a member turned, curious to see the woman who “knew what the word ‘transpose’ meant.”<sup>17</sup> The meeting motivated her and the other women to organize the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFAAS).<sup>18</sup> This led to dozens of female abolitionist societies forming throughout New England, and in 1837, the delegates from these state societies met and formed the National Female Anti-Slavery Society (NFASS).<sup>19</sup>

Though his positions regarding gender roles evolved, as an advocate of racial and gender equality, Garrison was ahead of his time. When Garrison was an editor of the *National Philanthropist* in early 1828, he wrote three articles in a series on “Female Influence” encouraging women to “involve themselves in temperance causes.”<sup>20</sup> He became a firm believer in the “moral influences of women” in social reform, but retained a belief in the “distinct spheres of action.”<sup>21</sup> In 1830, as editor of *Genius of Universal Emancipation* he wrote to respond to petitions presented to congress by “seven hundred Pittsburgh women in support of Cherokee rights in Georgia.”<sup>22</sup> He expressed his disapproval of women involving themselves in the political sphere that he believed belonged to men.

Slowly, Garrison’s ideology evolved and by 1832 Garrison admitted two “errors” hampered the progress of early anti-slavery efforts: men’s depreciation of women’s influence and women’s depreciation of their own influence.”<sup>23</sup> He became a strong supporter of a woman’s right to equal participation. However, while he and many of the AASS members were supportive on a local level, it was not until women demanded a more active role that the organization rethought the wisdom of preventing women from speaking before so-called “promiscuous audiences.” These mixed gender settings had posed a problem in the eighteenth century with women like Anne Hutchinson. Two hundred years had not changed men’s view of women with regard to their “submissive” role. Since many female abolitionists held their meetings in churches, when women like Angelina Grimké

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>19</sup> Suzanne O’Dea Schenken, *From Suffrage to the Senate: An Encyclopedia of American Women in Politics* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1999), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994.), 189.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 173.

spoke to congregants of audiences containing men and women, some men took exception.

For the most part, women of the early nineteenth century led circumspect lives, believing they belonged within the home, but this conventional belief did not stop others from becoming career abolitionists. Women like Mott, Grimké, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were well recognized for their leadership within the abolition movement. They were resilient, and chose to defy convention—and censure—to become strong advocates for the cause. They were little prepared for the condemnation that resulted simply because they sought to fulfill their sense of Christian duty.<sup>24</sup> With the Second Great Awakening, there was a new assertiveness on behalf of women that “tapped the spiritual authority...and applied the values of family pietism to larger communities.” Women felt a new sense of responsibility for correcting societal ills.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, they learned that even within the abolitionist community, men held strong views that opposed women speaking to mixed-gender audiences. This was also the case for women. Not all women were sympathetic to the struggle for women’s rights. Catherine Beecher was vocal in her opposition to women who failed to “appreciate the wisdom of [the] ordinance that appointed [women] her subordinate station.” Beecher believed that “the spirit of religion...strongly enforces the appropriate duties of a woman’s sphere.” She was particularly critical of women stepping out into the public sphere to petition the congress and believed that “IN ALL CASES, [fell] entirely without the sphere of female duty.”<sup>26</sup>

That is not to say that the issue regarding the suppression of free speech was strictly an issue for women. At the very heart of the struggle between the North and the South was the issue of free speech.<sup>27</sup> After the 1820 Missouri Compromise, the South genuinely held that it “bound morally the North not to talk about slavery in private conversation, and not to treat the [slave] as a human being.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the South had managed to impose this dogma on the whole of the North. By 1836, as the discourse in opposition to slavery became louder, the House of Representatives enacted a gag rule that restricted the debate or open discussion of slavery while Congress was in session. For years, John Quincy Adams fought this ruling believing that it was a direct violation of a citizen’s constitutional right.<sup>29</sup> Within a decade, the effort to suppress free speech was a

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>25</sup> Amanda Porterfield, *Spirituality in America From Sara Edwards to Martha Graham* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 110.

<sup>26</sup> Catherine E. Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1837), 36.

<sup>27</sup> Barzun, 16-17.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Allan Weinstein, *The Story of America: Freedom and Crisis from Settlement to Superpower* (New York: DK Publishing, Co., 2002), 257; William Henry Seward, “John Quincy Adams: Old

national obsession. Northern merchants and business owners had fears about what the emancipation of slaves would mean for them. The economic benefits of slavery meant they could not allow the abolitionists to succeed. Pro slavery supporters made it known they intended to put the abolitionist down—“by fair means if we can, by foul means if we must.”<sup>30</sup> It was the debate over the role of women, and their place in the antislavery fight that provided the perfect foil for those ‘foul means.’

To combat this, Garrison, never one to shy away from controversy, sought to shame these zealots in a very public way. In an issue of the *Liberator*, Garrison printed a lecture given by Reverend Albert Folsom, Pastor of Universalist Church in Hingham, Massachusetts on August 27, 1837. Folsom objected to women speaking, assuming positions of perceived authority before mixed audiences—particularly men:

If it is not permitted unto women to speak publicly upon the subject of religion, it verily is not part of their right... to be heard upon the subject of slavery. If it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church...it is no less shameful for her to raise her voice upon any other theme...Hence, they ought be looked upon as ‘busy bodies’ speaking things which they ought not...It is unbecoming the dignity of the feminine class of society to importune the National Court, year after year, upon the difficult subject of slavery...it is unbecoming...to threaten incessant application, until Congress shall grant the stale prayer of the misguided petitioners who are made up of all classes, characters and colors.<sup>31</sup>

There was never really an issue over women speaking to other women in organized situations, but in mixed gender audiences, women publically speaking were construed as them assuming a position of authority over men and were frequently interpreted as a violation of biblical doctrine. A woman taking an

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Man Eloquent” *Life and Public Services of John Quincy Adams* (1849) printed in Louis Filler,ed., *Abolition and Social Justice in the Era of Reform* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 154.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 20.; Author Note: John Jay Chapman writes about an incident with Reverend S. J. May, an agitator who had organized a commemoration of Dr. Charles Follen, a German abolitionist who fled to America to escape persecution for his “liberal thoughts.” At issue was Garrison’s presence at commemoration. The quote came directly from Chapman’s text referring only to a “New York merchant.” Chapman is a reputable author and poet, not a historian—additionally, the book was written in the early 1900s before the advent of many of the current historical standards. The biography on Garrison has no bibliography of sources, and so I was unable to track down the document that Chapman cited.

<sup>31</sup> Albert Folsom, “Lecture by Albert Folsom, Pastor , Universalist Church,” (August 27, 1837) printed in Sklar, 121-122.

active role in the abolition movement was within their moral authority—she was typically the ones who raised the children in the manner of their faith traditions—many believed it was their responsibility to teach from a position of moral authority. However, within many religious traditions, this was not acceptable when there were men involved. Such was the case with Folsom. His words represent the character of oppression—for women and slaves. He seemed to be reinforcing the 1836 House gag rule intended to prevent those ‘incessant applications’ from being brought into debate or open discussion while Congress was in session.

Despite sharing common goals, when it came to abolitionists, it was not an equal playing field between women and men. The struggle to abolish slavery played a pivotal role in creating awareness in women that there was no justifiable basis for their exclusion from equal participation. They were not concerned so much with equality in all things, only with what Thaddeus Stevens coined as “equality before the law.”<sup>32</sup> Had these fervent laborers for the cause not come up against such aggressive male opposition, they may not have recognized the significance of the similarities between the demands for slave independence and their own.

Angelina Grimké and her sister Sarah were the surprising vanguards of free speech—surprising because they were daughters of the South. They came from an influential family in Charleston, South Carolina. Their father, a plantation owner—descended from the French Protestant Huguenots and had been chief justice of South Carolina’s highest court. The two women had fourteen siblings, and the fact that some were African-American influenced their sensitivity towards the issue of slavery. As the women grew older, they openly expressed their opposition to slavery. The elder Grimké by twelve years, Sarah left first to head north and sought refuge in a Society of Friends (Quaker) community. Angelina sought to combat slavery at home and within the Presbyterian parish. Discouraged by what she viewed as her church sanctioning slavery, Angelina joined her sister in Pennsylvania a few years later and became an itinerant Quaker minister.<sup>33</sup>

Women like the Grimké sisters simply believed they deserved equal voice. The two sisters had not given personal liberty much consideration before becoming involved in the abolitionist movement. They wanted their right under the terms of the constitution to be recognized and did not view their activism as breaking any kind of decree. Moreover, protests were not being organized to

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<sup>32</sup> Thaddeus Stevens, “Remarks on the Presidents message and Emancipation, January 5, 1865, in Congress” printed in Beverly Wilson Palmer and Holly Byers Ochoa, eds., *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens: Volume 1: January 1814 – 1865* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 517.

<sup>33</sup> Sklar, 2-3.

dissent the oppression of women—that is until limitations were placed on their ability to fight for the freedom and emancipation of slaves.<sup>34</sup>

When Angelina read an account *The Liberator* in 1835, she felt called to action. She read of Garrison’s “postal campaign,” when pamphlets of “inflammatory appeals” were sent to her former hometown of Charleston. Mobs of protesters had broken into the post office, seized the anti-slavery literature of the AASS, and burned it beneath a hanging effigy of Garrison. The brave actions of these men gave her inspiration and purpose. She wrote a letter to Garrison, committing herself to the abolitionist cause—a cause she believed worth dying.<sup>35</sup>

Shortly after beginning her work with Garrison, Angelina met fellow abolitionists Theodore Weld and John Greenleaf Whittier. Connected by their shared faith, the three developed a strong sense of affinity; and yet the issue of free speech would divide their friendship and bring gender to the forefront of the discussion. It was difficult to gain an accord on the two issues. For Weld and Whittier, emancipation was simply a slavery issue, but for Grimké it included a woman’s right to share in the anti-slavery fight on an equal basis—not because she was a woman, but because she was one in humanity. This disparity in the scope can be seen through an examination of the letters written between the three agitators. Their letters provide an intimate view of the growing dichotomy within the abolition movement over the issues of free speech and gender. In 1837, she wrote a letter to Weld and Whittier addressing her upset over a recent speaking engagement and concern that fellow abolitionist Amos Phelps and other AASS members would “come out with a conscientious protest against us.” Grimké expressed her aggravation that the men in attendance of the conference had simply sat with their “mouths agape and eyes astare . . . [in] amazement at hearing a woman speak in the churches.” She was dismayed that the issue of gender unexpectedly thrust women in the “forefront of an entirely new contest – a contest for the *rights of woman* as a moral, intelligent & responsible being[s].” She explained to them that it would have been so much better had the issue of women’s equality not come up before the question of anti-slavery was settled. She pleaded for their support: “can’t *thou* stand *just here* side by side with us?”<sup>36</sup>

If Grimké had expected the unconditional support of her friends, however, she was disappointed. Like a father to a child, Weld rebuked her, declaring, “I do most deeply regret that you have begun a series of articles...on the rights of

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<sup>34</sup> Sklar, 3-6. Author Note: When the Grimké sisters learned that they had African American siblings, they fully acknowledged their kinship to them. However, critics have said that if the two sisters had not set out on a spiritual pilgrimage to the North, they probably would have maintained a far different position, and while they may have been sympathetic, they would have accepted that they had little, if any, ability to change the situation.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*; Angelina Grimké, “Letter to Theodore Weld” (August 12, 1837) printed in Sklar, 125.

woman,” and himself entreating “let us all *first* wake up the nation to lift millions of slaves of both sexes from the dust.” Whittier was not as kind, scolding the naïve writer for “abandoning...the poor and miserable slave...whose cries and groans are forever sounding in our ears ...[all for] some trifling oppression, political or social, which we may ourselves suffer.”<sup>37</sup> Grimké’s response was immediate and firing off the same letter to both her friends, she scorned the two men for being “greatly alarmed at the idea of advocating the *rights of woman*.” She shamed the men and their “perverted scripture” that was inevitably flung at women as soon as they sought to assert themselves. She questioned their commitment to the cause and inquired why they could not see that “women *could* do, & *would* do a hundred times more for the slave if she [was] not fettered.” For women to do good for the anti-slavery cause, it could only be if their “right” to labor was “firmly established,” not on the ground of gender but on the “firm basis of human rights.” Driving home her point she declared, “if we surrender the right to *speak* to the public...what *then* can *woman* do for the slave [when she] has been shamed into *silence*.” She was concerned that “clergy [would] stand in the way of reform.” It was the “stumbling block [that] must be removed *before* Slavery [could] be abolished.”<sup>38</sup> The division put an irreconcilable strain on her friendship with Whittier, and his inflexibility on this issue would cause other friendships to falter—particularly with Garrison, an ever strong vocal advocate and ally of gender equality.<sup>39</sup> Whittier and other opponents of Garrison’s radical views regarding women clashed. For reasons that seem to contradict the doctrine of equality—the tenet of the emancipation movement from the very beginning—men broke from the AASS and formed new anti-slavery societies, excluding women from membership.

As for Grimké’s friendship with Weld, as a testament to the efficacy of her aspirational language, Weld wrote only a single response: to ask for her hand in marriage and a mere three months after her fateful letter to Weld, in a highly controversial wedding ceremony—because it included mixed race and mixed gender clergy as well as guests—the couple recited their personal vows.<sup>40</sup> They

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<sup>37</sup> Angelina Grimké, “Letter to Theodore Dwight Weld and John Greenleaf Whittier” (August 20, 1837) printed in Sklar, 130.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 131, 133.

<sup>39</sup> Author note: In 1863, Garrison wrote a letter to Whittier on behalf of the women Managers of the National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary requesting an emancipation poem, he wrote, “to entreat you...not for their sakes, but in behalf of the glorious cause of impartial liberty so long espoused by you and them.” (William Lloyd Garrison, “Letter to John Greenleaf Whittier” (1863) printed in Walter M. Merrill, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison Volume V: Let The Oppressed Go Free 1861-1867* [Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979], 134).

<sup>40</sup> Author note: Grimké seemed to understand the efficacy of her words as well because in her acceptance of Weld’s proposal she wrote: “You speak of my letter to W. L. G. Ah! You felt then

solemnized their union as being one based upon complete egalitarian principles. They were “blessed by both a white and a black minister and the guests included whites as well as blacks.” The vows were progressive for the time because they omitted the words “obey” and included the new husband’s condemnation of “femme covert,” which by legal definition would “cover” the woman by the husband, thereby losing “all power of ownership over property, money, and even their own children.” Moreover, the two made an abolitionist statement by serving wedding cake made using an African American confectioner who used sugar grown without using slave labor.<sup>41</sup>

Three days later the newlyweds appeared at the second Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women in Pennsylvania. There, Angelina Grimké Weld took the stage as a barrage of stones shattered the windows. She continued speaking as a mob of ten thousand men, protesting the interracial nature and predominance of women at the event, raged relentlessly outside the newly constructed Pennsylvania Hall for the Free Discussion of Liberty, and Equality of Civil Rights, and the Evils of Slavery. It would be this lyceum’s first and last event. In an ultimate demonstration of destruction, protesters set fire and destroyed the building. This was the young abolitionist’s last lecture, as immediately following the incident, she and her sister retired from public appearances.<sup>42</sup> This was an odd irony given her impassioned pleas to her soon-to-be husband months earlier and unfortunate that she would withdraw so soon from her life of advocacy. Little information is available about the two sisters’ retreat to a less visible existence. It could have been the vivid reality of violence at Freedom Hall, or simple exhaustion. Months before her marriage, Grimké Weld paid a visit to friends in Brookline, Massachusetts and appreciated later “how delightful it was to stretch my weary limbs on a bed of ease, and roll off from my mind all the heavy responsibilities which had so long pressed upon it.”<sup>43</sup> While no longer appearing in public, the two women continued to remain active in the struggle for emancipation and women’s rights through their many letters and newspaper articles.

Thanks to pioneers like Grimké Weld and her legacy of courage, women continued to secure greater positions of authority within the abolition movement,

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that it was written under tremendous pressure of feelings bursting up with volcanic violence from the bottom of my soul—you felt that it was the first long breath of *liberty* which my imprisoned spirit dared to respire whilst in pine in hopeless bondage, painting after freedom to *think aloud*.” (Angelina Grimké, “Letter to Theodore Weld (1835),” quoted in Sklar, 39).

<sup>41</sup>Beverly Tomek and Angela F. Murphy, “Universal Emancipation: Anti-Slavery and Civil Rights in the Atlantic World: Grimké-Weld Wedding,” *Word Press*, <<http://universalemancipation.wordpress.com/major-abolition-events/Grimke-weld-wedding>>date accessed February 13, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Sklar, 35, 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

but the events of the 1840 International Anti-Slavery Convention in London gave women the realization that they would have to make a formal stand for their rights as individuals. Despite the advancements made during the previous decade to accept women in their roles as antislavery agitators, London was not receptive to the AASS sending female delegates. The British & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, as sponsors of the event, refused women a seat on the convention floor. They were relegated to chambers off premises, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote that it struck her as “very remarkable that abolitionists who felt so keenly the wrongs of the slave should be so oblivious to the equal wrongs of their own mothers, wives, and sisters.” Garrison found the offense unacceptable and declined to take his seat, protesting a conference that would not recognize the most sacrosanct right of all—the right of women to receive the same privileges as men.<sup>44</sup> For Stanton it was simple: “either men and women – all men and all women, black as well as white – were equal or they were not.”<sup>45</sup> Stanton, interestingly, had not attended the event as a delegate. She was a newlywed and had traveled half way across the world to support her husband. However, she shared in the women’s degradation. She had been particularly taken by Lucretia Mott, noting she was a completely new “revelation of womanhood.” When she reflected about when she first heard Mott speak and “heard from her lips that I had had the same right to think for myself that Luther, Calvin and John Knox had, and the same right to be guided by my own convictions. I felt at once a new born sense of dignity and freedom.”<sup>46</sup> She recalled hearing repeatedly at the convention that all sides remarked the time had come for women to demand liberties.

Back on American soil, Stanton had occasion to give voice to her frustration. Frederick Douglass recalled that on hearing Stanton recount her and Mott’s exclusion from the convention. He recalled he “could not meet her arguments” with regard to the wrongs and injustices of women being excluded from equal participation. He was moved by her eloquence and unwillingness to accept his rationale of “natural divisions of duties, the discussion of ‘woman’s sphere.’”<sup>47</sup> Stanton made him a believer. While Douglass was not representative of all African American perceptions of women, his was the leading voice—his words carried tremendous power within the African American community. Later he wrote:

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<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897*, quoted in Geoffrey C. Ward, *Not For Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 29-30.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>46</sup> Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, quoted in Ward, *Not for Ourselves Alone*, 30.

<sup>47</sup> Martin, Jr. 137.

“If intelligence is the only true and rational basis of government, it follows that that is the best government which draws its life and power from the largest sources of wisdom, energy, and goodness at its command...In this denial of the right [of women] to participate in government, not merely the degradation of women.”<sup>48</sup>

Douglass acknowledged that it was his gratitude for the “agency, devotion, and efficiency in pleading the cause of the slave” that moved him to commit and advocate for women’s rights because he realized then that the “cause of the slave has been peculiarly a woman’s cause.”<sup>49</sup>

It would take eight years, but in 1848, the women’s movement was formally organized at the Women’s Right’s Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. There, Stanton read from the *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments* that—directly from the words written by Thomas Jefferson in the *Declaration of Independence*—only incorporating women into the dialog. It stated that “men and women are created equal” and that “the history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman” as having established “absolute tyranny over her.”<sup>50</sup> The abolitionists’ experience in London put to the forefront the awareness that when it came to rights of speech, property, voting—the right to hold office or serve as a leader in political organizations—women could be, and were, denied legal claim. For Stanton it was clear: “If God has assigned a sphere to a man and one to woman, we claim the right ourselves to judge His design in reference to us.”<sup>51</sup> The advent of the emancipation movement meant that women were no longer oblivious to their fettered life in their domestic boxes—separate spheres of domain for men and women.

There was no impetus to respond to the grievances of women, and they were not addressed because the issue of gender was not thought a moral issue. There were no obvious economic considerations for failure to amend the constitution. Nor would the country go to war over it. Because these issues lacked a voice raised in political support, women were restricted in their ability to influence government and introduce legislation.<sup>52</sup> Stanton was convinced that if votes for slaves and women were not “pushed through” at a time when “the constitutional door [was] open” then the issue for women could be “delayed for decades.” When the constitutional door *was* open, the United States Constitution,

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<sup>48</sup> Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 907.

<sup>49</sup> Douglass, 907, 903.

<sup>50</sup> Stanton, “The Declaration of Sentiments” (July 1848) printed in Linda K. Kerber et al. 260-261.

<sup>51</sup> Stanton, *National Reformer*, (Sept. 14, 1848) printed in Stephen Railton and the University of Virginia, ed. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture* (2012)

<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abwmct.html>. Date accessed 4/2/2014.

<sup>52</sup> Schenken , 4.

for the very first time, included a 'sexual distinction' to explicitly "[designate] voters as 'male citizens.'"<sup>53</sup> Stanton's prediction became a reality, and women would not obtain the right to vote for another fifty years, but through the efficacy of aspirational language one voice is all that is needed to effect tremendous social change.

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<sup>53</sup> Ward, 103.

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