

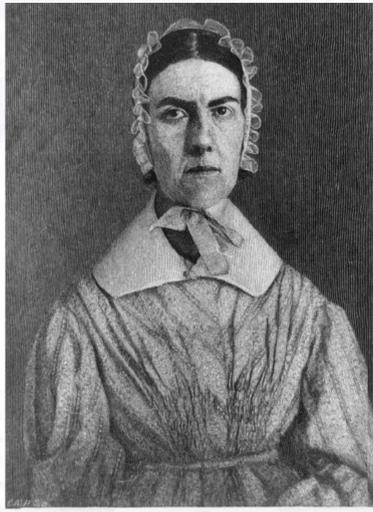
Sarah and Angelina Grimké

(1792-1879)



The anti-slavery activities of the Grimké sisters raised the “woman question.” Should women speak in public and exercise political rights?

“I know nothing of man’s rights, or woman’s rights; human rights are all that I recognize.”
 Sarah Moore Grimké, 1837



A. B. Grimké



Sarah M. Grimké

Angelina and Sarah Grimké. These images are often used to portray the sisters. They are woodcuts, not photographs. Possibly their severity was intended to discredit the Grimkés in some publications.

For the first eight years of her life Sarah Grimké lived in this Charleston townhouse (currently known as the Heyward-Washington House).



Rejecting Slavery

Sarah and Angelina Grimké grew up in a wealthy, slave owning family in Charleston, South Carolina. By the time each sister reached her twenties, she could no longer bear living with the legal practice of human bondage. Failing to persuade their mother to free her slaves, they left South Carolina and eventually took to lecturing for the immediate abolition of slavery. For women to lecture was controversial. Congregational ministers in Massachusetts charged them with violating the duties of Christian women to be “unobtrusive and private.”

First Woman to Address a Legislature

In 1838 Angelina spoke over parts of three days to a committee of the Massachusetts legislature. For her first speech, such a large crowd showed up, drawn by the novelty of a woman speaking, that her presentation was moved to the House chamber. After the second speech she wrote of her growing confidence. “I felt none of that tremendous pressure upon my spirit which had bowed me to the ground [before]. I felt as if I could stand up in the dignity of my moral being and face a frowning world.”

The Feminist Writings of Sarah Grimké

Perhaps overshadowed as a speaker by her sister, Sarah Grimké was a thoughtful writer. Her “Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women” endorsed women as political beings and is seen as an important early statement of feminism.



The Grimké Sisters in Hyde Park

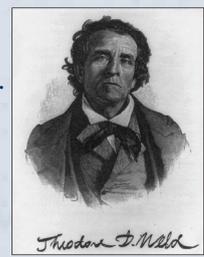


In 1863 the Grimké sisters bought a house on Fairmont Avenue in Hyde Park. In 1870 they organized a suffrage demonstration. After nominating candidates for local office at a women’s caucus, they marched through a snowstorm with a group of suffragists to cast their ballots. Although the votes did not count, this was the first time women went to the polls in Massachusetts.

Organizing for Woman’s Suffrage. HYDE PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Educating the Public

Angelina married abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld in 1838. The following year, the couple, joined by Sarah, wrote American Slavery As It Is to educate Americans about the realities of slavery. Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, it became a best seller and was an inspiration for Harriet Beecher Stowe to write Uncle Tom’s Cabin.



Theodore Dwight Weld LIBRARY OF CONGRESS