

Chapter 101 -- White Abolitionists Organize To Advance The Cause



Dates:
1833-1835

Sections:

- Beginning Of The American Anti-Slavery Society
- A Southern Woman, Angelina Grimke, Speaks Out Against Slavery

Time: December 6, 1833

Beginning Of The American Anti-Slavery Society



Three Freed Slave Children from
New Orleans

In the early 1830's, the two heretofore separate wings of the white abolitionist movements – one in Boston led by Lloyd Garrison and the other in New York led by the Theodore Weld and the Tappan brothers – link up to provide more scale and better coordination for the cause.

In December 1833 this pays off in a seminal event – the founding of The American Anti-Slavery Society.

The organization takes shape at a meeting held in Philadelphia on December 6, 1833, and attended by 62 delegates, including 21 Quakers, who are all committed to emancipating the slaves.

Lloyd Garrison drafts a Declaration of Sentiments that lays out the Society's guiding principles. These call for:

- Immediate emancipation of all slaves;
- Refusal to pay compensation to any “man-stealers;”
- Opposition to re-colonization plans;
- Efforts to assimilate blacks into white society; and
- Commitment to achieving these ends peacefully, without violence.

Arthur Tappan becomes the first President of the Society, and its membership comprises many of the early abolitionist leaders – Theodore Weld, Lucretia Mott, Wendell Phillips, Lucy Stone, Arthur Tappan, Abby Foster and others.

The Society provides the centralized organizational infrastructure the Abolitionists need to accomplish three things:

- Proliferate local anti-slavery chapters from New England to the western territories;
- Align the mission and agendas of these chapters with the national priorities; and
- Coordinate local and national initiatives to maximize public and political attention.

Chapters hold regular meetings to hear the latest news from national headquarters and to plan their local campaigns.

The word is spread in a variety of ways.

Public speaking tours feature the Society’s leading advocates for abolition addressing crowds gathered in local town halls and at Independence Day picnics. These events eventually include moving testimonials from ex-slaves, and often have a revivalist flair, in search of new converts.

Local newspapers touting abolition rhetoric also begin to spring up, much to the chagrin of citizens who regard the editors as dangerous radicals. While many of these papers are fleeting, a sizable and stable body of writers and publishers backing emancipation will materialize over time.

Once up and running, the national Society sends out agents to recruit local supporters. By 1840 this number will reach 2,000 chapters, with roughly 200,000 members.

Time: 1835-1836

A Southern Woman, Angelina Grimke, Speaks Out Against Slavery

Among those courageous few whites who speak out early against slavery is Angelina Grimke, formerly of Charleston, South Carolina.

Angelina and her sister, Sarah, are born into Charleston society, daughters of a wealthy judge and plantation owner. In a world dominated by men and convention, “Nina” Grimke forms and expresses her own opinions, beginning in childhood.

She is drawn to religious study, converts from her Episcopalian roots to the Presbyterian Church, and teaches Sunday school, even to slave children. The more she reads her Bible, the more convinced she becomes that the slavery she witnesses around her conflicts with Christian moral tenets.

In 1829, at 24 years of age, she stands in front of fellow church members and asks them to end their practice of slavery. When they refuse, her outspoken persistence leads to expulsion, first from the church and then from Charleston society. From this point forward she is an outsider in the South.

True to her character, this outcast status only drives her further into the anti-slavery camp. She and Sarah both adopt Quaker tenets and practices, and flee to Philadelphia in 1827. Once there, Angelina becomes a founding member of the radical Abolitionist movement, connecting with Lloyd Garrison, and joining the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1835. Her destiny is now set.

She writes a "letter" to Garrison in 1835 which he publishes in *The Liberator* under the title of *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*. The letter includes a carefully crafted review of the history of slavery as outlined in the Bible and its linkage to the American Declaration of Independence.

Its message to the women of the South is clear: those who believe in the teachings of Christ must abandon their support for slavery.

Angelina next trains as an official "lecturer" for the Abolitionist movement and goes on the speaking tour. In 1838 she marries her fellow advocate, Theodore Dwight Weld, and delivers a remarkable testimonial address in Philadelphia, as a hostile mob assaults the hall with stones and cat-calls.

As a Southerner I feel that it is my duty to stand up here to-night and bear testimony against slavery. I have seen it -- I have seen it. I know it has horrors that can never be described. I was brought up under its wing: I witnessed for many years its demoralizing influences, and its destructiveness to human happiness.

Many times have I wept in the land of my birth, over the system of slavery. I knew of none who sympathized in my feelings -- I was unaware that any efforts were made to deliver the oppressed - - no voice in the wilderness was heard calling on the people to repent and do works meant for repentance -- and my heart sickened within me. Oh, how should I have rejoiced to know that such efforts as these were being made. I only wonder that I had such feelings. I wonder when I reflect under what influence I was brought up, that my heart is not harder than the nether millstone. But in the midst of temptation I was preserved, and my sympathy grew warmer, and my hatred of slavery more inveterate, until at last I have exiled myself from my native land because I could no longer endure to hear the wailing of the slave.

Many persons go to the South for a season, and are hospitably entertained in the parlor and at the table of the slave-holder. They never enter the huts of the slaves; they know nothing of the dark side of the picture, and they return home with praises on their lips of the generous character of those with whom they had tarried.

Nothing but the corrupting influence of slavery on the hearts of the Northern people can induce them to apologize for it; and much will have been done for the destruction of Southern slavery when we have so reformed the North that no one here will be willing to risk his reputation by advocating or even excusing the holding of men as property. The South knows it, and acknowledge that as fast as our principles prevail, the hold of the master must be relaxed.

What if the mob (outside) should now burst in upon us, break up our meeting and commit violence upon our persons -- would this be anything compared with what the slaves endure? No, no: and we do not remember them...if we shrink in the time of peril, or feel unwilling to sacrifice ourselves, if need be, for their sake....There is nothing to be feared from those who would stop

our mouths, but they themselves should fear and tremble. The current is even now setting fast against them.

We may talk of occupying neutral ground, but on this subject... there is no such thing as neutral ground. He that is not for us is against us. If you are on what you suppose to be neutral ground, the South look upon you as on the side of the oppressor.

We often hear the question asked, "What shall we do?" Women of Philadelphia! Allow me as a Southern woman with much attachment to the land of my birth, to entreat you to come up to this work. Especially let me urge you to petition. Men may settle this and other questions at the ballot-box, but you have no such right; it is only through petitions that you can reach the Legislature

Men who hold the rod over slaves, rule in the councils of the nation: and they deny our right to petition and to remonstrate against abuses of our sex and of our kind. We have these rights, however, from our God. Only let us exercise them

Angelina Grimke's heroic break with her pro-slavery upbringing in Charleston serves as inspiration for others, especially women, to join the Abolitionist chorus. She herself will live on to 1879, and see the fruits of her quest.