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MARIA STEWART

Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston

1833

As she prepared to leave Boston, Stewart's farewell address expressed her belief that her leadership had been rejected by the black community because she was a woman. Yet she also presented a spirited defense of her female identity and her ability to advance the interests of free black people.

On my arrival here, not finding scarce an individual who felt interested in these subjects [the welfare of the black community], and but few of the whites, except Mr. Garrison, and his friend, Mr. Knapp; and hearing that those gentlemen had observed that female influence was powerful; my soul became fired with a holy zeal for your cause. . . . The spirit of God came before me, and I spake before many. When going home,

The Liberator, Sept. 28, 1833; reprinted in Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 65-74.

reflecting on what I had said, I felt ashamed, and knew not where I should hide myself. A something said within my breast, "Press forward, I will be with thee." And my heart made this reply, "Lord, if thou wilt be with me, then I will speak for thee as long as I live." . . .

What if I am a woman; is not the God of ancient times the God of these modern days? Did he not raise up Deborah, to be a mother, and a judge in Israel? Did not queen Esther save the lives of the Jews? And Mary Magdalene first declare the resurrection of Christ from the dead? . . . St. Paul declared that it was a shame for a woman to speak in public. . . . Did St. Paul but know of our wrongs and deprivations, I presume he would make no objections to our pleading in public for our rights. . . .

If such women as are here described have once existed, be no longer astonished then, my brethren and friends, that God at this eventful period should raise up your own females to strive, by their example both in public and private, to assist those who are endeavoring to stop the strong current of prejudice that flows so profusely against us at present. No longer ridicule their efforts, it will be counted for sin. For God makes use of feeble means sometimes, to bring about his most exalted purposes. . . .

Dearly beloved, I have made myself contemptible in the eyes of many, that I might win some. But it has been like labor in vain. . . . The bitterness of my soul has departed from those who endeavored to discourage and hinder me in my Christian progress; and I can now forgive my enemies, bless those who have hated me, and cheerfully pray for those who have spitefully used and persecuted me.

FARE YOU WELL, FAREWELL.
MARIA STEWART

SARAH FORTEN

*Letter to Angelina Grimké**Philadelphia, April 15, 1837*

Sarah Forten responded to Angelina's desire to learn about the effects of racial prejudice. Forten evaluated the positive effects of the antislavery movement as well as the negative influence of racial prejudice on her life. She also provided a cogent assessment of the colonization movement. Daughter of one of Philadelphia's wealthiest black families, Forten wrote poetry and essays for the antislavery press, and was an active member of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. A poem she wrote for the 1837 Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women was read to the gathering.

ESTEEMED FRIEND:

I have to thank you for the interest which has led you to address a letter to me on subject which claims so large a share of your attention. In making a reply to the question proposed by you, I might truly advance the excuse of inability; but you well know how to compassionate the weakness of one who has written but little on the subject, and who has until very lately lived and acted more for herself than for the good of others. I confess that I am wholly indebted to the Abolition cause for arousing me from apathy and indifference, shedding light into a mind which has been too long wrapt in selfish darkness.

In reply to your question — of the "effect of Prejudice" on myself, I must acknowledge that it has often embittered my feelings, particularly when I recollect that we are the innocent victims of it; for you are well aware that it originates from dislike to the color of the skin, as much as from the degradation of Slavery. I am peculiarly sensitive on this point, and consequently seek to avoid as much as possible mingling with those who exist under its influence. I must also own that it has often engendered feelings of discontent and mortification in my breast when I saw that many were preferred before me, who by education, birth, or worldly circumstances were no better than myself. THEIR sole claim to notice

Weld-Grimké Letters, 1:379.

depending on the superior advantage of being *White*; but I am striving to live above such heart burnings, and will learn to "bear and forbear" believing that a spirit of forbearance under such evils is all that we as a people can well exert.

Colonization is, as you well know, the offspring of Prejudice. It has doubtless had a baneful influence on our People. I despise the aim of that Institution most heartily, and have never yet met one man or woman of Color who thought better of it than I do. I believe, with all just and good persons, that it originated more immediately from prejudice than from philanthropy. The longing desire of a separation induces this belief, and the spirit of "this is not your Country" is made manifest by many obstacles it throws in the way of their advancement mentally and morally. No doubt but there has always existed the same amount of prejudice in the minds of Americans towards the descendants of Africa; it wanted only the spirit of colonization to call it into action. It can be seen in the exclusion of the colored people from their churches, or placing them in obscure corners. We see it in their being barred from a participation with others in acquiring any useful knowledge; public lectures are not usually free to the colored people; they may not avail themselves of the right to drink at the fountain of learning, or gain an insight into the arts and science of our favored land. All this and more do they feel acutely. I only marvel that they are in possession of any knowledge at all, circumscribed as they have been by an all powerful prejudice. Even our professed friends have not yet rid themselves of it — to some of them it clings like a dark mantle obscuring their many virtues and choking up the avenues to higher and nobler sentiments. I recollect the words of one of the one of the best and least prejudiced men in the Abolition ranks. "Ah," said he, "I can recall the time when in walking with a colored brother, the darker the night, the better Abolitionist was I." He does not say so now, but my friend, how much of this leaven still lingers in the hearts of our white brethern and sisters is oftentimes made manifest to us; but when we recollect what great sacrifices to public sentiment they are called upon to make, we cannot wholly blame them. Many, very many are anxious to take up the cross, but how few are strong enough to bear it. For our own family, we have to thank a kind Providence for placing us in a situation that has hitherto prevented us from falling under the weight of this evil; we feel it but in a slight degree compared with many others. We are not much dependent upon the tender mercies of our enemies, always having resources within ourselves to which we can apply. We are not disturbed in our social relations; we never travel far from home and seldom go to public places unless quite

sure that admission is free to all; therefore we meet with none of these mortifications which might otherwise ensue. I would recommend to my colored friends to follow our example and they would be spared some very painful realities. . . .

Do you know whether the Ladies have fixed on the day for holding their Convention? Do you not think it would be best to hold it the day before the men's meeting, for most of us would be desirous to be present at both meetings. Could you not suggest this plan? There will probably be a large delegation from our society. My sisters propose going but not as Delegates. I presume there will be a sale of fancy articles there, as we were requested to send some of our work. We are all quite busy preparing something pretty and useful. Several of our schools will have specimens of work and penmanship to be sent. . . .

My Parents and Sisters unite with me in affection to you and your excellent sister.

YOURS AFFECTIONATELY
SARAH L. FORTEN

SOJOURNER TRUTH

*Speech at Akron Women's Rights Convention**Ohio, June 1851*

Reprinted in a variety of forms, this notable speech by Sojourner Truth — seer, abolitionist, and woman's rights advocate — was most accurately rendered in the Anti-Slavery Bugle of Salem, Ohio. There it appeared with an introductory paragraph.

One of the most unique and interesting speeches of the Convention was made by Sojourner Truth, an emancipated slave. It is impossible to transfer it to paper, or convey any adequate idea of the effect it produced upon the audience. Those only can appreciate it who saw her powerful form, her whole-souled, earnest gesture, and listened to her strong and truthful tones. She came forward to the platform and addressing the President said with great simplicity:

May I say a few words? Receiving an affirmative answer, she proceeded; I want to say a few words about this matter. I am a woman's rights [*sic*]. I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now.

Anti-Slavery Bugle, Salem, Ohio, June 21, 1851, reprinted in Carleton Mabee, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 81.

As for intellect, all I can say is, if woman have a pint and man a quart — why can't she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much — for we won't take more than our pint'll hold.

The poor men seem to be all in confusion and don't know what to do. Why children, if you have woman's rights give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they won't be so much trouble.

I can't read, but I can hear. I have heard the Bible and have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it right side up again. The lady has spoke about Jesus, how he never spurned woman from him, and she was right. When Lazarus died, Mary and Martha came to him with faith and love and besought him to raise their brother. And Jesus wept — and Lazarus came forth. And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bore him. Man, where is your part?

But the women are coming up bless be God and a few of the men are coming up with them. But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, and he is surely between a hawk and a buzzard.

ANGELINA GRIMKÉ

Letter to Anne Warren Weston

Fort Lee, N.J., July 15, 1838

Angelina's letter to a leading member of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society inquired about the split within the movement and described the sisters' "domestic characters."

MY DEAR ANNA:

... I thank thee also for thy account of the N E Convention in reference to the Woman Question. Like all other truth, when brought out *practically*, it is causing deep searchings of heart & revealing the secrets of the soul. I believe this can no more be driven back from the field of investigation than the doctrine of Human rights, of which it is a part, & a very important part. And N E will be the battleground, for she is most certainly the moral light house of our nation. Perhaps it was all for the best Abby [Kelley] had to stand alone. I know how strengthening it is to feel that we have no arms of flesh to lean on, & for her sake I rejoice in her loneliness. ... I cannot help hoping [Abby Kelley] will yet come out as a lecturer in the cause of the poor slave. Such practical advocacy of the rights of woman are worth every thing to *every* reform, at least, so I believe.

Has unity of spirit been restored to the Female Society in Boston? I long to hear from your *striving together* in the faith of Abolition as you once did. What plans are you pursuing this year? What are you doing with your friends?

We keep no help & therefore are filling up "the appropriate sphere of woman" to admiration, in the kitchen with baking pans & pots & steamers &c., & in the parlor & chambers with the broom & the duster. Indeed, I think our enemies wld rejoice, could they only look in upon us from day to day & see us toiling in domestic life, instead of lecturing to *promiscuous* audiences. Now I verily believe that we are *thus* doing *as much* for the cause of woman as we did by public speaking. For it is ab-

olutely necessary that we should show that we are *not* ruined as domestic characters, but so far from ~~it~~ *as soon* as duty calls us home, we can & do rejoice in the release from public service, & are as anxious to make good bread as we ever were to deliver a good lecture. Our ignorance and inexperience often leads to mistakes & failures in the cooking department, but to Theodore's contented and cheerful mind everything is good and home is delightful. We all like doing without a [hired] girl very much indeed for we find that it is very sweet to serve one another in love, each bearing a part of the burden, & so by a division of labor, rendering it comparatively easy to get along. ...

I REMAIN THINE — ANGELINA G. WELD

LYDIA MARIA CHILD

Letter to Angelina Grimké

Boston, September 2, 1839

Child's published letter reviewed the causes of the split within the antislavery movement and asserted her own moderate but firm position on women's rights.

DEAR FRIEND:

You ask me what I am thinking about the anti-slavery controversy, and whether I am not disheartened by recent divisions. ...

With regard to the Woman Question, as it is termed ... the Massachusetts Society have simply refused to take action upon it when the minority have urged them to do it. In the beginning, we were brought together by strong sympathy for the slave, without stopping to inquire about each other's religious opinions, or appropriate spheres. Then, women were hailed by acclamation as helpers in the great work. They joined societies, they labored diligently, and they stood against a scoffing world bravely.

HENRY CLARKE WRIGHT

Marriage and Parentage

1858

Wright's new career as an itinerant lecturer and writer on family reform proved more successful than his earlier work with the antislavery movement. His support of women's rights shifted from advocating women's public rights in the 1830s to promoting women's rights to control their bodies in the 1850s.

A man has no right to compel his wife to lie or murder. He has no more right to compel her to yield to his passion, and thus to lie against the instincts of her nature, and kill the yearnings of her soul for true companionship, by urging upon her a passion which swallows up all other forces of her nature. No matter whether the violence that enables the man, under the name of husband, to enforce upon her the conditions of maternity, be in his own superior muscular energy, or in the shape of civil law or social and ecclesiastical sanction, the outrage upon her person is the same. . . .

Man can perpetrate no deeper wrong to himself, to his wife and child, and to his domestic peace, than to urge upon his wife maternity, when he knows her nature rebels against it. Nor can woman commit a greater crime against herself and her child, than to consent to become a mother, when her nature not only does not call for it, but actively repels it.

Let the wife say to the husband, "Show me thy love in some gentler way; let my head repose upon thee as upon a rock of trust; let me feel thine arms around me, to defend me from all harm, not to bring it to me." . . . Who but a ruffian would disregard such a request? Who but a being less than a man would say, "No matter how *you* feel, *I* wish to be gratified." The wife should be the regulator of *this* marriage relation, for only in obedience to the laws of her nature can she hope to continue to be the loving, healthful, happy wife. . . .

Henry C. Wright, *Marriage and Parentage or The Reproductive Element in Man, as a Means to His Elevation and Happiness* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1858), 252-53, 301-02.

The man who regards the presence of the reproductive element in himself as a means of sensuous gratification, and marriage as a licensed mode of expending that element and of obtaining that gratification, can never hope to make for himself a pure and happy home. . . . By a constant expenditure of the vital element of his manhood, he enfeebles his reason, his conscience, his affection, and his power to love and appreciate his wife and child. He becomes repulsive, and incapable of forming true family relations. On our knowledge of the natural laws which should govern the expenditure of the reproductive element, and on our obedience to them, depend the question of a happy home.

