

Ira V. Brown
PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

**“AM I NOT A WOMAN AND A SISTER?”
THE ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION OF
AMERICAN WOMEN, 1837–1839**

A significant feature of the radical abolitionist movement inaugurated by William Lloyd Garrison with the first number of the *Liberator* in January 1831, and institutionalized by the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society in December, 1833, was the attraction it held for women. The political experience women gained through participation in this crusade and the hostility they faced in connection with it served as important roots of American feminism. Of particular interest in this connection are the proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, which held three annual sessions from 1837 to 1839, probably the first national conventions of women ever held. The second of these conventions, which culminated in the burning of Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia, caused a New York newspaper to express the opinion that those “females who so far forget the province of their sex as to perambulate the country” in order to attend antislavery meetings should be “sent to insane asylums.”¹

The first notable American female abolitionist was Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, a Philadelphia Quaker born in 1807, who wrote a column entitled the “Ladies’ Repository” for Benjamin Lundy’s *Genius of Universal Emancipation* between 1829 and 1834, the year of her death.² William Lloyd Garrison, who had worked as co-editor of Lundy’s paper, began to include a “Ladies’ Department” in the *Liberator* early in 1832. It was headed by a woodcut of the famous Wedgwood medallion depicting a female slave in chains and kneeling in a posture of supplication, inscribed with the motto “Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?”³ British women were already playing an influential role

in the antislavery movement. One of them, Elizabeth Heyrick, had suggested as early as 1824 that the reformers' goal should be "immediate, not gradual abolition"—a phrase which provided the slogan for radical abolitionism in America.⁴ Several female antislavery societies were organized in Great Britain during the 1820's.⁵

In 1832 Garrison issued a call to American women to follow the example of British women. "Two capital errors," he wrote in the *Liberator* on July 14, 1832, were having a detrimental effect on the cause of abolition in the United States. One was the tendency of male abolitionists to "overlook or depreciate" the influence women might exert. The other was the tendency of women to undervalue their own power or, "through a misconception of duty, to excuse themselves from engaging in the enterprise." A million American females were held as slaves, he noted—"liable to be sold or used for the gratification of the lust or avarice or convenience of unprincipled speculators." "*When woman's heart is bleeding,*" he asked, "*shall woman's voice be hushed?*"⁶

Black women of Salem, Massachusetts, had already formed an antislavery society on February 22, 1832.⁷ Rhode Island women established an antislavery society in Providence on July 1, 1832.⁸ Within the next five years scores of such organizations were formed; many, however, were short-lived. The most prominent of these were the ones organized in Boston on October 14, 1833, in Philadelphia on December 9, 1833, and in New York City some time in 1835. The convention which met in Philadelphia December 4-6, 1833 to establish the American Anti-Slavery Society passed a resolution commending the abolition cause to women and urging them to organize female auxiliaries.⁹ In 1837 it reported a total of more than one thousand auxiliaries, of which approximately seventy-five consisted of women.¹⁰

By 1836 several American women had won national prominence in the antislavery crusade. Though not officially recognized as a delegate, Lucretia Mott attended and spoke at the convention which organized the American Anti-Slavery Society. Three days after this gathering ended she took the lead in forming the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, which continued its activity until after the dissolution of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1871. While Mrs. Mott, a leading figure among Hicksite Quakers and an accomplished public speaker, was its best-known member, Sarah Pugh was president for most of its history, and Mary Grew faithfully wrote its annual reports, regularly issued in printed form. Abigail ("Abba") May Alcott, mother of Louisa May, was also a member in its early years, while her husband Bronson

was teaching in Germantown. The society was racially integrated. Among its black members were Grace Bustill Douglass, who ran a millinery store, and her daughter Sarah Mapps Douglass (a teacher), Margaretta and Sarah Forten, and Harriet Forten Purvis, daughters of James Forten, a prosperous Philadelphia sailmaker. Sarah and Angelina Grimké, who left their slave-holding family in Charleston, South Carolina, and who were soon to become the most notable female abolitionists, were also members of the Philadelphia society for several years.¹¹

The president of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society in its early years was Mary S. Parker, but its leading figure was Maria Weston Chapman, its "foreign corresponding secretary," who wrote its annual reports. Its best-known member was Lydia Maria Child, author of an important antislavery tract entitled *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, published in 1833. The Boston group included one outstanding black woman, Susan Paul, daughter of the Reverend Thomas Paul, pastor of the African Baptist Church.¹² This society attracted national attention when, on October 21, 1835, its meeting was broken up by a mob acting under the impression that the notorious English abolitionist George Thompson was to be the featured speaker. Forewarned of trouble, Thompson did not appear, but the mob seized William Lloyd Garrison, who had been engaged as a substitute, and dragged him through the streets of the city with a rope around his neck.¹³

The Ladies' New-York City Anti-Slavery Society numbered among its generally undistinguished membership Juliana Tappan, eldest daughter of Lewis Tappan, who with his brother Arthur dominated the American Anti-Slavery Society in its early years.¹⁴

On August 4, 1836 Maria Weston Chapman, on behalf of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, addressed a letter to Mary Grew, corresponding secretary of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, proposing the formation of "a general executive committee" to coordinate the work of the female societies, especially as it related to the petitions with which the societies are bombarding Congress to demand the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.¹⁵ On behalf of the Philadelphia group, Mary Grew replied a month later that the proposal was "expedient and desirable," though some of their members "would much prefer a recognition of female members and delegates in the American Society."¹⁶ The Philadelphia women went on to suggest that a convention be held in New York City during the second week of May, 1837.

Other female antislavery societies were notified and asked to send representatives to this convention, which assembled in New York on Tuesday May 9, 1837 at 4:00 p.m. Seventy-one delegates were present for this unprecedented national convention of women. Massachusetts and Pennsylvania sent the largest contingents, twenty-two each. New York sent nineteen, Rhode Island three, New Hampshire and Ohio two each, and New Jersey one. Lucretia Mott served as temporary chairman, but Mary S. Parker was chosen president. Six vice presidents were selected: Lydia Maria Child, Abby Ann Cox (of New York City), Grace Douglass, Sarah M. Grimké, Lucretia Mott, and Ann C. Smith (wife of Gerrit Smith of Peterboro, New York). Four persons were chosen as secretaries: Mary Grew, Angelina Grimké, Sarah Pugh, and Anne Warren Weston (sister of Maria Weston Chapman).¹⁷

After the selection of officers, the president read the twenty-seventh Psalm and offered a prayer. Then Sarah Grimké made a statement concerning the objects of the convention: "to interest women in the subject of anti-slavery, and establish a system of operations throughout every town and village in the free States, that would exert a powerful influence in the abolition of American slavery."¹⁸ All persons present who approved of these objects were then invited to sign the roll. The most notable figure among those delegates not chosen as officers was Abby Kelley of Lynn, Massachusetts. One hundred and three persons were enrolled as "corresponding members." The Grimké sisters were included in this group, presumably because they did not represent a local society. Their residence was listed as South Carolina. Letters were read from four women unable to be present, including Maria Weston Chapman. Their letters were printed as an appendix to the convention's *Proceedings*. The first day's session ended with the appointment of a ten-member committee "to prepare and bring forward business for the Convention."¹⁹

The convention held another plenary session at 3:00 p.m. the following day. The business committee reported recommendations that the convention consider the following subjects:

1. an appeal to the women of the "nominally Free States"
2. an address to "Free Colored Americans"
3. a letter to the women of Great Britain
4. a circular to female antislavery societies in the United States
5. a letter to juvenile antislavery societies in the United States
6. a letter to Congressman John Quincy Adams.

Three-member committees were appointed to prepare these documents, and several of them were published by the convention.²⁰

The bulk of the convention's attention on the second day was devoted to discussion and adoption of nine resolutions presented in turn by Lydia Maria Child and by Sarah and Angelina Grimké. The first of these, prepared by Mrs. Child, declared that the antislavery cause was "the cause of God, who created mankind free, and of Christ, who died to redeem them from every yoke," and that it was "the duty of every human being to labor to preserve, and to restore to all who are deprived of it, God's gift of freedom; thus showing love and gratitude to the Great Redeemer by treading in his steps."²¹ The second one, also offered by Mrs. Child, declared that while the antislavery women rejoiced in any mitigation in cruel treatment of the slaves, they believed that "the great question" was not "one of treatment, but of *principle*," and hence that "no compromise can be made on the score of kind usage, while man is held as the property of man."²²

Angelina Grimké then proposed a series of three resolutions denouncing northern complicity in the preservation of slavery. The first one declared that "the combination of interest which exists between the North and the South in their political, commercial, and domestic relations" was responsible for the efforts in the North to suppress abolitionist agitation and to "traduce the characters of abolitionists."²³ The second condemned northerners for cooperation with the South in the return of fugitive slaves. The third one denounced the efforts which had been made to deny abolitionists the right to petition Congress for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and the Territory of Florida, and for the abolition of the interstate slave trade.²⁴ The inability of Congress to act on these questions was also seen as evidence of northern complicity in slavery.

Sarah Grimké then proposed a resolution condemning northerners for marrying slaveholders, thereby "identifying themselves with a system which desecrates the marriage relation among a large portion of the white inhabitants of the southern states, and utterly destroys it among the victims of their oppression."²⁵ The next resolution, proposed by Mrs. Child, urged the repeal of northern state laws permitting slaveholders to retain ownership of their slaves while on visits to the North and the passage of laws by northern state legislatures guaranteeing alleged fugitive slaves the right of trial by jury.²⁶

The second day of the convention ended with a spirited debate on two resolutions offered by the Grimké sisters on the rights and obligations of women in the prosecution of the antislavery cause. Sarah's was rather innocuous and was not voted on. Angelina's was more radical. It declared that the time had come "for woman to move in that sphere which Providence has assigned her, and no longer remain satisfied in the

circumscribed limits with which corrupt custom and a perverted application of Scripture have encircled her” and that it was “the duty of woman, and the province of woman . . . to do all that she can by her voice, and her pen, and her purse, and the influence of her example, to overthrow the horrible system of American slavery.”²⁷ Several amendments were offered, but the resolution was finally adopted without change, “though *not unanimously*.”²⁸

On Thursday May 11 the convention was called to order at 10:00 A.M. and the session was opened as usual with Scripture and a prayer. Lydia Maria Child proposed resolutions condemning the American Bible Society, foreign mission boards, and kindred organizations supported by the churches for soliciting contributions from slaveholders. They were approved with three dissenting votes.²⁹ Angelina Grimké presented a report from the committee which had been appointed to prepare an “Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States.” After debate the report was sent back to committee, with six new members being added to the original committee of three.

At the afternoon session Sarah Grimké presented a report from the committee which had been appointed to prepare an “Address to Free Colored Americans.” It too was sent back to committee, with six new members added. An effort was made to reconsider the resolution on the province of women which had passed the day before, but the effort failed. Abby Ann Cox of New York commended the anti-slavery cause to all *mothers*, urging them to guard their children’s minds against the acceptance of slavery and race prejudice. Sarah Grimké followed this with a resolution urging mothers to educate their children in “the principles of peace.”³⁰ Lydia Maria Child presented a report from the committee to prepare a circular to female antislavery societies, which like the other reports was sent back to committee with suggested revisions.

President Parker then addressed the convention on the importance of circulating antislavery petitions to Congress and to state legislatures. The roll was called and pledges were given “promising their exertions in this cause.”³¹ Martha Storrs of Utica, New York moved a resolution declaring it the duty of women to send petitions to ecclesiastical bodies asking them to “declare slavery a sin, which ought to be immediately repented of. . . .”³² Anne Warren Weston offered a resolution condemning the American Colonization Society as “anti-republican and anti-Christian.” This resolution evoked lively discussion and “some touching appeals from the colored members of the Convention.”³³ It was adopted.

Angelina Grimké offered a resolution denouncing race prejudice and asking women to pray to be delivered from “such an unholy feeling” and to practice “the principle of Christian equality” by associating with black people “as though the color of the skin was of no more consequence than that of the hair, or the eyes.”³⁴ Lucretia Mott presented a resolution asking women to abstain from the use of the products of slave labor.³⁵ Angelina Grimké moved resolutions on behalf of educational integration, praising institutions such as Oberlin and Western Reserve which were admitting black students along with white.³⁶ The *Proceedings* do not indicate whether these resolutions were adopted. Sarah Grimké proposed a resolution recommending wider use of antislavery prints in the emancipation movement. Abby Kelley proposed that women practice personal economy, especially in regard to clothing, in order to be able to contribute more liberally to the antislavery cause.³⁷ With the adoption of this resolution Thursday’s proceedings were closed.

At Friday morning’s session pledges were made to pay the expenses of the convention’s publications. The amount of \$260 was pledged on behalf of twenty-five societies represented in the convention, plus \$97.50 from sixteen individuals, for a grand total of \$357.50.³⁸ It was decided to print the proceedings of the convention and to send copies to all persons who attended and to all antislavery societies of women who had not been represented in the convention. It was also decided that the convention would meet in Philadelphia during the third week of May in the following year, 1838. “Central committees” consisting of three members each from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were appointed for the purpose of conducting correspondence relating to the movement between conventions.³⁹

The committee which had been charged with preparing a letter to John Quincy Adams presented its report, which was adopted along with a resolution thanking him for his efforts to preserve the right of petition but deploring his unwillingness to support the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.⁴⁰ Lydia Maria Child presented eight additional resolutions, which apparently were adopted toward the close of the convention. Among these were proposals calling on abolitionists to give employment to black people and to work toward non-segregated seating in churches, and to refuse to contribute toward the purchase of slaves from their owners. These last-minute resolutions also recommended that the wives and daughters of clergymen endeavor to convert their husbands and fathers to “declare the whole counsel of God on the subject of slavery” and to open their pulpits to antislavery speakers.⁴¹ Women

were also asked to participate in monthly concerts of prayer for the slaves and to pray for emancipation in family worship services. Finally they declared that, "laying aside sectarian views, and private opinions, respecting certain parts of the preceding resolutions," they would pledge to each other and to the world to unite efforts for the accomplishment of "the holy object of our association."⁴² After prayer by the president, who was commended by several delegates for the "dignity and impartiality" with which she had performed her duties, the convention adjourned.⁴³

In addition to the *Proceedings*, two publications came out of the convention. Of these *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States*, written by Angelina Grimké, was of particular importance. It represented a major contribution to the antislavery crusade. In this 68-page pamphlet Angelina first took up two objections to female abolitionism. One was the charge that the abolitionists were setting back the process of emancipation, which she denied without much explanation. The other was that slavery was a political question, with which women should not be concerned. To this she responded that women had properly concerned themselves with political subjects from time to time in the past. She went on to discuss the moral and religious aspects of slavery, observing that "*All moral beings have essentially the same rights and the same duties, whether they be male or female.*" Of the female slaves she remarked, "they are our sisters."⁴⁴ She pictured slavery as a cruel institution, in which use of the lash was commonplace, even by women or their surrogates. She called on northern women to boycott the products of slave labor, as women had eschewed the use of British imports in the period preceding the American Revolution.

She took particular pains to affirm the intellectual capacity of black people as being equal to that of whites, giving examples of the achievements of outstanding blacks such as Benjamin Banneker. She observed that God "hath made of one blood all the nations" and that there was really "but *one race* of human beings."⁴⁵ She denounced the American Colonization Society at some length, branding it a proslavery organization and one which fostered race prejudice. She presented evidence from southerners indicating that they would welcome northern help in abolishing slavery. She suggested a number of ways in which northern women could help the cause of abolition: they could organize antislavery societies; they could declare slavery "a crime against God and against man"; they could read about slavery and disseminate information about it; they could petition their church governing bodies to repudiate slavery; they could sign petitions to Congress for the

abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia and in Florida, and for the prohibition of the interstate slave trade; they could refrain from the use of slave-grown products; they could treat black people as equals and visit their schools and churches; they could appeal to the consciences of southern women; they could pray for the cause; they could follow the example of Jesus and the Apostles by risking persecution for the sake of righteousness; they could stand side by side with men in "the wide field of moral enterprise and holy aggressive conflict with the master sin of the American republic, and the American church."⁴⁶

The convention also issued a 32-page *Address to Free Colored Americans*, written by Sarah Grimké. This pamphlet covered much the same ground as the preceding one, with special emphasis on the equal potential of black people for intellectual attainment and advice to them to practice economy in expenditures, to avoid gaudy dress, to stay away from theaters ("a sink of vice"), to join benevolent and literary societies, and to abstain from the products of slave labor. Free blacks were commended for their opposition to the American Colonization Society. They were advised to abjure violence in their efforts to rescue fugitives and to bear persecution in the spirit of Christian martyrs. Finally, they were urged to cooperate fully in the crusade against slavery.

Immediately after the adjournment of the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, the Grimké sisters embarked on a speaking tour of Massachusetts under the auspices of the American Anti-Slavery Society. While it was originally intended that they would speak only to female audiences, their appearances attracted so much interest that many men came to hear them, and the result was to create a controversy in antislavery circles and in the churches over whether women should be permitted to address "promiscuous assemblies."⁴⁷ Less venturesome female abolitionists contented themselves with holding monthly meetings, doing fancy needlework for their annual Christmas bazaars (which raised a large portion of the money that supported the antislavery effort), and circulating petitions to Congress. Philadelphia women devoted a large part of their efforts during late 1837 and early 1838 to soliciting funds for the construction of Pennsylvania Hall, a spacious auditorium built under abolitionist auspices and opened for public use on May 14, 1838. The second annual Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women assembled there on Tuesday, May 15th.

The convention was called to order at 10:00 a.m. in the Session Room on the first floor of Pennsylvania Hall (the main auditorium was

upstairs). There were 203 delegates, almost three times as many as had been present for the 1837 convention, and 75 corresponding members. Mary S. Parker of Boston was again chosen president. Maria Weston Chapman, Susan Paul, Lucretia Mott, and Sarah Grimké were numbered among the ten vice presidents. Anne W. Weston and Martha V. Ball (a black) of Boston, Juliana A. Tappan of New York, and Sarah Lewis of Philadelphia were the four secretaries. Sarah M. Douglass of Philadelphia was chosen treasurer. The large business committee included several of the officers plus Angelina Grimké, who had just been married to Theodore Dwight Weld the day before in an unorthodox ceremony attended by blacks as well as whites. One of the younger delegates, Abby Kelley, proposed that a public meeting be held Wednesday evening in the hall's main auditorium so that all who were interested might hear Mrs. Weld lecture on slavery as she had known it.⁴⁸ Arrangements were made to do this. It was a decision with disastrous results.

While the women were meeting, anonymous placards were being posted in various places around the city calling attention to the proceedings in Pennsylvania Hall "for the avowed purpose of effecting the immediate abolition of slavery throughout the U. States" and inviting "citizens entertaining a proper respect for the right of property and the Constitution of these states" to meet at Pennsylvania Hall the next day and demand "the immediate dispersion of said Convention."⁴⁹ It is not clear whether the placards were referring to the women's convention or to sessions of the Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society which were being held at the same time.

Since Pennsylvania Hall was occupied by other groups on Wednesday, the women held that day's session in Temperance Hall. Discussion seems to have centered largely around the petition campaign. Juliana Tappan moved that "whatever may be the sacrifice," they should continue to maintain the right of petition "until the slave shall go free, or our energies, like Lovejoy's, are paralyzed in death."⁵⁰ Objection was made to the reference to Elijah Lovejoy as implying endorsement of his use of force to protect his press, but the resolution was passed as presented.⁵¹ Miss Tappan also proposed that for every petition which Congress had rejected during the preceding year, *five* should be presented during the coming year. Mary Grew offered a resolution declaring that it was "our duty to keep ourselves separate from those churches which receive to their pulpits and their communion tables, those who buy, or sell, or hold as property, the image of the living God."⁵² A lengthy and animated discussion ensued. Six delegates spoke

in favor of the resolution and five against it. The dissenters argued that they could do more for the antislavery cause by working within their churches instead of withdrawing from them.⁵³ The resolution was adopted by a divided vote.

On Wednesday evening William Lloyd Garrison and a number of women spoke at a public meeting in the large auditorium of Pennsylvania Hall, packed to its capacity of three thousand with a mixed audience of men and women, white and black. This was not an official session of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women; indeed, many of its members considered it improper for women to address audiences consisting of both sexes. Lucretia Mott, among the speakers, expressed the hope that "such false notions of delicacy and propriety would not long obtain in this enlightened country."⁵⁴ Maria Weston Chapman and Abby Kelley also spoke. The star of the evening was Angelina Grimké Weld, who was in her best form. Speaking of slavery, she declared:

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. It is admitted by some that the slave is not happy under the *worst* forms of slavery. But I have *never* seen a happy slave. I have seen him dance in his chains, it is true; but he was not happy.⁵⁵

Meantime a mob had gathered outside the building and begun throwing rocks at the windows. The glass was smashed, but no one in the auditorium was injured, because shutters inside the windows were securely fastened. Mrs. Weld continued speaking, unafraid, asking:

What is a mob? What would the breaking of every window be? What would the levelling of this Hall be? Any evidence that we are wrong, or that slavery is good and wholesome institution? What if the mob should now burst in upon us, break up our meeting, and commit violence upon our persons—would this be any thing compared with what the slaves endure?⁵⁶

Considerably shaken, but unharmed, the women returned to their lodgings for the night. However, several black men were attacked in the streets.

The women held another official session in one of the smaller rooms of Pennsylvania Hall on Thursday morning. According to the *Proceedings*, Lucretia Mott "made some impressive remarks respecting the riot of the preceding evening, and exhorted the members of the Convention

to be steadfast and solemn in the prosecution of the business for which they were assembled.”⁵⁷ Resolutions were proposed relative to the obligations of women to support abolition and to teach their children abolitionist principles. The duty of women to petition church officials to adopt antislavery measures was also discussed. Thursday afternoon’s session was devoted mainly to discussion of the boycotting of slave-grown produce.⁵⁸ Leaving the hall, the white women took black women by the arm and walked two abreast through a hostile crowd which had again assembled outside the building.⁵⁹

Concerned for the safety not only of individuals but of the hall itself, its managers sent a committee to Philadelphia Mayor John Swift’s office to request police protection for the building. The mayor refused to provide this but decided to make a personal visit to the hall to disperse the crowd himself, on the condition that the managers would lock the building, give him the keys, and agree not to hold any meetings that evening. The mayor addressed the crowd, informing them that there would be no further meetings, but it did not disperse, and soon after he left the rioters broke into the building and set it afire. Within a few hours it was burned to the ground. Firemen were called, but they confined their activities to preventing the blaze from spreading to adjacent structures. The pretext for the attack on the hall appears to have been the charge that it was a “temple of amalgamation,” that is, miscegenation.⁶⁰ Newspapers all over the country carried reports that white women had been seen walking arm-in-arm with black men in the vicinity of the hall.⁶¹

The abolitionist Arnold Buffum, who was present, related an anecdote which epitomizes the state of public opinion in the city at the time. On his way to a house where abolitionists were gathering for the evening, most likely the home of the Motts, he was accosted by a group of “savage looking men.” One of them cried out, “Down with the Quaker, down with the nigger’s friend!” He told them that he was going after some of his family and wished to move on. “Down with him,” someone cried, “down with him, cut him in pieces and throw him into the Delaware!” Then “a giant-like, fierce looking fellow” began to interrogate him, asking: “Is your wife a black woman?” He answered “No.” “Would you have married her if she had been? No. Have you daughters? Yes. Have they married black men? No. Would you advise them to marry black men? No. Are you for amalgamation? No. Well, you are a good fellow, you may go along.”⁶²

Undaunted by the threat of further mob action, members of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women converged the next

morning on Temperance Hall, where they had previously agreed to meet on Friday. They found the door closed against them, the building's owners fearing that it would meet the same fate as Pennsylvania Hall. Sarah Pugh, a Philadelphia teacher and president of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, offered the use of her school room as a place for the convention's closing session. It was a long walk, and the women were jeered at as they made their way through the streets to the new location.⁶³ "The appearance of this meeting," it was reported, as "very solemn." President Parker read from the Bible "with a tremulous voice."⁶⁴ Juliana Tappan offered a fervent prayer that the participants in the riot might repent of their evil deeds and receive forgiveness. Mrs. Mott spoke on the subject of the riot with "true eloquence." The mob was reported to have been heading for her house, but a friend of the Motts' steered them off in the wrong direction.⁶⁵

It was [she said] a search time. I had often thought how I should sustain myself if called to pass such an ordeal. I hope I speak it not in the spirit of boasting when I tell you, my sisters, I believe I was strengthened of God. I felt at the moment that I was willing to suffer whatever the cause required. My best feelings acquit me of shrinking back in the hour of danger. But the mob was not suffered to molest us, and I feel thankful that we slept a few hours in tranquility and peace.⁶⁶

All the women were not so fortunate as Mrs. Mott; Maria Weston Chapman suffered a nervous collapse.⁶⁷

At the final session of the convention Sarah Grimké proposed a resolution declaring that the "insult and scorn" which had been heaped upon them by Philadelphia hoodlums was "identical with the spirit of slavery at the South" and with the spirit of Pennsylvania's recent constitutional convention which had deprived black men of the right to vote.⁶⁸ She also proposed a resolution to the effect that it was the duty of abolitionists to combat race prejudice by sitting with black people in their churches, "by appearing with them in our streets, by giving them our countenance in steam-boats and stages, by visiting them at their homes and encouraging them to visit us, receiving them as we do our white fellow citizens." The resolution was passed, but a number of votes were cast against it by women who believed that a statement "couched in such phraseology might, by being misapprehended, injure the abolition cause."⁶⁹ Angelina Grimké Weld proposed a resolution expressing "grief and shame" over the burning of Pennsylvania Hall but also "hope that God will overrule evil for good, by causing the flames which

consumed that beautiful Hall, dedicated to virtue, liberty, and independence, to light up the fires of freedom on every hilltop and in every valley in the state of Pennsylvania, and our country at large."⁷⁰ The members agreed to meet in Philadelphia again in May, 1839.⁷¹

A committee on publications was appointed to oversee the printing of several addresses which had been adopted by the convention, and \$377.50 was pledged to defray the cost of that project. In addition to the *Proceedings*, the publications included an *Address to the Free Colored People of the United States*, quite similar to the one which had been issued the previous year, an *Address to Anti-Slavery Societies*, which is of special interest because it endorsed Garrison's principle of non-resistance, and an *Address to the Senators and Representatives of the Free States, in the Congress of the United States*, which demanded that Congress abolish slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia.

The women who had attended the convention kept in touch with each other by mail during the ensuing year. Writing to Anne Warren Weston of Boston on Christmas day, 1838, Mary Grew of Philadelphia expressed the hope that "our New England friends" had not repented of their decision to hold another meeting in the "City of Brotherly Love" next May. "We will endeavor to give you a better reception, and accommodations, than you met with last spring." The cause was prospering in Philadelphia, she wrote optimistically, "and public opinion is improving."⁷² However, there was difficulty finding a suitable place for the convention to meet. The women finally settled on the hall of the Pennsylvania Riding School, where 102 delegates assembled on Wednesday, May 1, 1839. There were 68 corresponding members.⁷³

A few days before the convention was to open, the mayor of Philadelphia called on Lucretia Mott to inquire where the convention would be held, whether it would be confined to women, to white women only or white and black, and whether the sessions would be limited to daylight hours. He was determined to avoid a repetition of the riot of 1838. He suggested that they meet in Clarkson Hall, a building owned by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and used as a school. Mrs. Mott thought this was not large enough. The Riding School was the best they could obtain. It had a barn-roof, with no ceiling and could not easily be lighted at night, so there would be no evening sessions. The mayor also advised the women to "avoid unnecessary walking with colored people." To this Mrs. Mott replied that the ladies would walk with blacks "as

occasion offered." It was a principle of the convention, she said, "to make no distinction on account of color."⁷⁴

The great bulk of the delegates were from Pennsylvania. Several of the individuals who had played conspicuous roles in the two previous conventions were absent from this one. The Grimké sisters had retired to private life. Maria Weston Chapman had come to the conclusion that women should work together with men in the American Anti-Slavery Society. Lydia Maria Child agreed. Declining to participate in the 1839 women's convention, she wrote to Lucretia Mott: "I never have entered very earnestly into the plan of female conventions and societies. They always seemed to me like half a pair of scissors."⁷⁵

The members of the convention again declared their faith in the fundamental principle of radical abolitionism, namely that slavery was "a sin, and ought immediately to be abolished."⁷⁶ They also resolved to continue the petition campaign so far as it concerned federal territories and the interstate slave trade. They again urged people to abstain from the use of slave-grown products. They resolved to increase their efforts to improve the condition of free blacks by "giving them mechanical, literary, and religious instruction, and assisting to establish them in trades, and such other employments as are now denied them on account of their color."⁷⁷ They resolved to deny themselves "some of the luxuries and superfluities" in which women indulged in order to contribute more liberally to the antislavery cause. They expressed their "regret" over the fact that so many ministers of the Gospel appeared to be hostile to "the holy cause of good will toward man, without regard to color."⁷⁸ They declared their willingness to undergo persecution on account of their principles.

They pledged \$232.75 to support publication of the *Proceedings* and three supplementary statements.⁷⁹ The first of these, an *Address to the Society of Friends on the Subject of Slavery*, charged Quakers with having abandoned their heritage of social protest and urged them to return to it by witnessing more effectively against slavery. The second, *An Appeal to American Women, on Prejudice against Color*, called for the opening of "every social advantage, moral, literary, and religious" to all people, regardless of color.⁸⁰ The third, entitled *Circular of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women*, begged female abolitionists to continue not only to sign but to take the responsibility of circulating antislavery petitions to Congress and the state legislatures.

It is our only means of direct political action [the *Circular* said]. It is not ours to fill the offices of government, or to assist in the election

of those who shall fill them. We do not enact or enforce the laws of the land. The only direct influence which we can exert upon our Legislatures, is by protests and petitions. Shall we not, then, be greatly delinquent if we neglect *these*?⁸¹

All three of these appeals were signed on behalf of the convention by Sarah Lewis of Philadelphia, president, and by four of the secretaries: Martha V. Ball of Boston, Sara G. Buffman of Fall River, Massachusetts, and Mary Grew and Anna M. Hopper of Philadelphia.

Members of the 1839 convention resolved to meet in Boston the following year at a time to be fixed later.⁸² This meeting was never held. Within a few days after the women's convention ended in Philadelphia, the American Anti-Slavery Society met in New York and granted women the right to take part in its proceedings. In May, 1840 it permitted the election of women as officers. Abby Kelley was chosen to serve on the business committee. Maria Weston Chapman, Lydia Maria Child, and Lucretia Mott were elected to the executive committee. Male members who opposed this development withdrew and formed the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.⁸³

The significance of these three trail-blazing women's conventions is two-fold. In the first place, they enabled women living in places distant from each other to become personally acquainted, to encourage and strengthen one another, to obtain new ideas for conducting their antislavery work, and to be inspired to greater zeal in a difficult undertaking.⁸⁴ In the second place, they gave women political experience which they put to good use when they inaugurated a crusade for their own rights ten years later. Thus they deserve to be remembered as one of the sources of American feminism. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton put it, the female antislavery conventions were "the initiative steps to organized public action and the Woman Suffrage Movement *per se*."⁸⁵

NOTES

1. New York *Commercial Advertiser*, quoted in *The Liberator*, May 25, 1838.
2. Merton L. Dillon, "Chandler, Elizabeth Margaret," in Edward T. James *et al.*, *Notable American Women, 1607-1950* (3 vols. Cambridge, Mass. 1971), 1:319-320.
3. Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children*, 4 vols. (New York, 1885-1889, reprinted 1969), 1:304.
4. David Brion Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 39 (Sept. 1962):220.
5. Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation* (Urbana, Ill., 1972), 177-179.

6. *The Liberator*, July 14, 1832.
7. *Ibid.*, Nov. 17, 1832.
8. *Ibid.*, July 14, 1832.
9. *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention, Assembled at Philadelphia, December 4, 5, and 6, 1833* (New York, 1833), 17.
10. American Anti-Slavery Society, *Fourth Annual Report* (New York, 1837), 123ff.
11. On the history of this society see Ira V. Brown, "Cradle of Feminism: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1833-1840," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 102 (April 1978):143-166.
12. James Oliver Horton, "Generations of Protest: Black Families and Social Reform in Anti-Bellum Boston," *New England Quarterly*, 49 (June 1976):245-247.
13. The fullest account of this incident may be found in Garrisons, *William Lloyd Garrison*, 2:1-72. See also *Report of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society; with a Concise Statement of Events, Previous and Subsequent to the Annual meeting of 1835* (Boston, 1836), 9-38.
14. On the Tappans see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery* (Cleveland, 1969).
15. Papers of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
16. Mary Grew to Maria Weston Chapman, September 9, 1836, Boston Public Library.
17. *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in the City of New-York, May 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th, 1837* (New York, 1837), 3.
18. *Ibid.*, 3-4
19. *Ibid.*, 6.
20. *Ibid.*, 6-7.
21. *Ibid.*, 7.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.* 7-8.
24. *Ibid.*, 8.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 9.
28. *Ibid.* The *Proceedings* do not give the text of the debate. However, in a footnote they give the names of twelve women who wished to have their names recorded in the minutes as "disapproving of some parts" of the resolution.
29. *Ibid.*, 10.
30. *Ibid.*, 12.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*, 13.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 14.

37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, 15.
39. *Ibid.*, 16.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, 17.
42. *Ibid.*, 18.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States, Issued by an Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women* (New York, 1837), 19–20.
45. *Ibid.*, 34.
46. *Ibid.*, 67.
47. On the Grimké's speaking tour of New England see Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters of South Carolina: Rebels against Slavery* (Boston, 1967), 165–204.
48. At Miss Kelley's request this resolution was omitted from the convention's *Proceedings*. See Mary Grew to Anne Warren Weston, Dec. 25, 1838, Boston Public Library.
49. [Samuel Webb], *History of Pennsylvania Hall, Which Was Destroyed by a Mob, on the 17th of May, 1838* (Philadelphia, 1838), 136.
50. *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1838* (Philadelphia, 1838), 5.
51. [Laura H. Lovell], *Report of a Delegate to the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia May, 1838*. . . . (Boston, 1838), 9. The author was a delegate from the Fall River (Mass.) Female Anti-Slavery Society. Her report is a useful supplement to the official *Proceedings*.
52. *Proceedings* (1838), 5.
53. [Lovell], *Report of a Delegate*, 9.
54. [Webb], *History of Pennsylvania Hall*, 127.
55. *Ibid.*, 124.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Proceedings* (1838), 6.
58. *Ibid.*, 7.
59. [Lovell], *Report of a Delegate*, 17.
60. On this episode see Ira V. Brown, "Racism and Sexism: The Case of Pennsylvania Hall," *Phylon*, 37 (June 1976): 126–136.
61. Lorman Ratner, *Powder Keg: Northern Opposition to the Antislavery Movement, 1837–1840* (New York, 1968), 87.
62. [Lovell], *Report of a Delegate*, 19.
63. *Ibid.*, 21.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Anna Davis Hallowell, ed., *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters* (Boston, 1884), 129.
66. [Lovell], *Report of a Delegate*, 22.
67. Carline Weston to Mary G. Chapman, May 21, 1838, Boston Public Library.

68. *Proceedings* (1838), 10.
69. *Ibid.*, 8.
70. *Ibid.*, 10.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Mary Grew to Anne Warren Weston, Dec. 25, 1838, Boston Public Library.
73. *Proceedings of the Third Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 1st, 2d and 3d, 1839* (Philadelphia, 1839), 3, 13, 14.
74. *Ibid.*, 6.
75. Lydia Maria Child to Lucretia Mott, March 5, 1839, in Hallowell, *James and Lucretia Mott*, 136.
76. *Proceedings* (1839), 4.
77. *Ibid.*, 8.
78. *Ibid.*, 10.
79. *Ibid.*, 9. In 1839 these appeals to particular groups were bound with the proceedings in one pamphlet of twenty-eight pages.
80. *Ibid.*, 24.
81. *Ibid.*, 26.
82. *Ibid.*, 12.
83. Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor, 1961), 285-286.
84. Such was the testimony of Laura H. Lovell in her *Report of a Delegate* (1838), 23-24.
85. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *et al.*, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 vols. (New York, 1881-1922), 1:342.