

## Wedding of Angelina Grimké and Theodore Weld (1838)

*Angelina Grimké grew up in a white slaveholding family in South Carolina but relocated north to Philadelphia, as did her sisters Sarah and Anna. In Philadelphia, Angelina and Sarah became active in organized abolitionism. Although Anna also opposed slavery, she hung back from Angelina and Sarah's activism because it was too radical for her.*

*On May 14, 1838, Angelina married Theodore Weld, another white abolitionist, in a ceremony that the couple designed and conducted themselves. Weld was a Presbyterian, Grimké a Quaker; both held theological and social views that were unusually liberal for their religious communities. The following collection of texts produced around the wedding—a historical “scrapbook,” as it were—shows different ways that the self-designed ceremony expressed Grimké's and Weld's commitments to abolition and racial equality, as well as to women's rights and the religious authority of individuals as compared to institutions.*

### 1. Wedding invitation, handwritten on abolitionist letterhead



Engraved by P. Reason,<sup>a</sup>  
*A Colored Young Man of the City of New York. 1835.*

Dear friend—

With the love of Divine Providence, we expect to be united in marriage on the 14th instant at 8 o'clock. Wilt thou give us thy presence and sympathy and prayers on that evening at [the home of] Anna R. Frost, No. 3 Belmont Row, Spruce St. above Juniper.

Angelina E. Grimké  
Theodore D. Weld

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<sup>a</sup> Patrick Reason, a freeborn African American engraver and abolitionist.

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## 2. From a letter by Angelina Grimké to Theodore Weld

I mean to get our cake, etc., made by a *colored* confectioner who has just set up a shop and makes everything of free sugar.<sup>b</sup> Sisters both send their love [...]

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## 3. From a letter by Sarah Grimké to a friend in England

I must now give thee some account of my dear sister's marriage, which probably thou hast already heard of. Her precious husband is emphatically a man of God, a member of the Presbyterian Church. Of course, Angelina will be disowned for forming this connection, and I shall be for attending the marriage.<sup>c</sup> We feel no regret at this circumstance, believing that the discipline which cuts us off from membership for an act so strictly in conformity with the will of God, and so sanctioned by His word, as is the marriage of the righteous must be anti-Christian, and I am thankful for an opportunity to testify against it.

The marriage was solemnized at the house of our sister, Anna R. Frost, in Philadelphia, on the 14th instant. By the law of Pennsylvania, a marriage is legal if witnessed by twelve persons. Neither clergyman nor magistrate is required to be present. Angelina could not conscientiously consent to be married by a clergyman, and Theodore D. Weld cheerfully consented to have the marriage solemnized in such manner as comported with her views. We all felt that the presence of a magistrate, a stranger, would be unpleasant to us at such a time, and we therefore concluded to invite such of our friends as we desired and have the marriage solemnized as a religious act, in a religious and social meeting.

Neither Theodore nor Angelina felt as if they could bind themselves to any preconceived form of words and, accordingly, uttered such as the Lord gave them at the moment. Theodore addressed Angelina in a solemn and tender manner. He alluded to the unrighteous power vested in a husband by the laws of the United States over the person and property of his wife, and he abjured all authority, all government, save the influence which love would give to them over each other as moral and immortal beings. I would give much could I recall the words, but I cannot. Angelina's address to him was brief but comprehensive, containing a promise to honor him, to prefer him above herself, to love him with a pure heart fervently.

Immediately after this we knelt, and dear Theodore poured out his soul in solemn supplication for the blessing of God on their union, that it might be productive of enlarged usefulness and

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<sup>b</sup> That is, the confectioner used only sugar that had been produced without enslaved labor. Such sugar was available, for instance, from Caribbean islands controlled by the British, where an emancipation law had been implemented in 1834.

<sup>c</sup> Angelina and Sarah belonged to a Quaker group that prohibited its members from marrying non-Quakers or from being present when such marriages were performed.

increased sympathy for the slave. Angelina followed in a melting appeal to our Heavenly Father for a blessing on them, and that their union might glorify Him, and then asked His guidance and overshadowing love through the rest of their pilgrimage. A colored Presbyterian minister then prayed and was followed by a white one, and then I felt as if I could not restrain the language of praise and thanksgiving to Him who had condescended to be in the midst of this marriage feast and to pour forth abundantly the oil and wine of consolation and rejoicing. The Lord Jesus was the first guest invited to be present, and He condescended to bless us with His presence and to sanction and sanctify the union which was thus consummated.

The certificate was then read by William Lloyd Garrison and was signed by the company. The evening was spent in pleasant social intercourse. Several colored persons were present, among them two liberated slaves who formerly belonged to our father, had come by inheritance to sister Anna, and had been freed by her. They were our invited guests, and we thus had an opportunity to bear our testimony against the horrible prejudice which prevails against colored persons and the equally awful prejudice against the poor.

#### Sources:

1. Letter from Angelina E. Grimké to Anne Warren Weston, May 1, 1838. Rare Books Department, Boston Public Library. From a digital scan by Digital Commonwealth, <https://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/dv143d30h>. No known copyright restrictions; no known restrictions on use. Engraved image cropped from the digital scan, and brightness increased.
2. Letter from Angelina E. Grimké to Theodore D. Weld, May 6, 1838, as reproduced in Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844* (New York: D. Appleton–Century Co., for the American Historical Association, 1934), 2:662-666. A short quotation from the letter is reproduced here under principles of fair use for educational purposes.
3. Letter from Sarah Grimké to Elizabeth Pease, May 20 [?], 1838, as quoted in Catherine H. Birney, *The Grimké Sisters: Sarah and Angelina Grimké, the First American Women Advocates of Abolition and Woman's Rights* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1885), 232-233, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.69015000048146>. Public domain. Reprinted in Barnes and Dumond, *Letters*, 2:678-679, with the recipient identified and a proposed date given.

Texts edited and annotated by John-Charles Duffy. Paragraph breaks added to Sarah Grimké's letter for readability. Across all three texts, punctuation and some capitalization emended in line with modern conventions. The use of lowercase for the racial labels *colored* and *white* reproduces the usage of the source publications; so also does the capitalizing of the caption printed beneath the engraved letterhead image, of the phrase *Divine Providence*, and of divine pronouns. The use of italics in the printed sources is replicated here.

These edited texts are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the sources listed above.



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