

THE RHETORIC OF THE AMERICAN ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT  
AS APPLIED TO GRIFFIN'S THESIS OF HISTORICAL MOVEMENT

by

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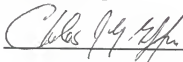
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## INTRODUCTION

This report reviews research studies of the rhetoric of the American Antislavery Movement with a framework suggested by Leland M. Griffin's 1952 model of historical movement. My major reason for selecting the rhetoric of the American Antislavery Movement as the subject of this report stems from my fascination with history. I am intrigued with the manner in which one event can influence another event, starting an entire chain of events which alter the courses of nations, lives, and social structures. This was the case with the issue of slavery. It provoked the formation of the American Antislavery Movement, which in turn played its role in the chain of events that provoked the American Civil War, changing forever, not only the economic and cultural structure of the South, but American society as a whole.

I chose Griffin's model of historical movement as a framework for reviewing the research studies concerning the rhetoric of the American Antislavery Movement because I believed that the collected body of research should be studied within an established model or thesis of movement study. In researching the studies that went into this report, I reviewed several models of movement study. Of these models, two stood out: Griffin's model of historical movement and the "organic systems approach" devised by Charles J. Stewart, Craig Allen Smith and Robert E. Denton, Jr. While the Stewart, Smith and

Denton organic systems model was designed to define and describe a given movement in terms of the individuals within the movement, who they collectively perceive themselves as being, the environment in which the movement exists, the relational patterns and adaptive strategies employed by the members of the movement, and the results which those strategies obtain, Griffin's model went further. Griffin's model was designed to not only define and describe a historical movement as it progressed through its life cycle, but also to examine both the rhetoric and the rhetors of such a movement.

In his 1952.essay, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," Leland M. Griffin listed five general questions that the student of the rhetoric of historical movements might wish to raise when considering a movement for study. Griffin's third question asked: "How should the student go about the business of isolating and analyzing the rhetorical movement?"<sup>1</sup> Griffin believed that to answer this question required the student of rhetoric to do two things: 1) classify the type of rhetorical movement under investigation, and 2) describe its structure through time.

With regard to the first of these requirements, Griffin argued that there exist two different types of rhetorical movements, "pro" and "anti". He defined a pro movement as an attempt "...to arouse public opinion to the creation or acceptance of an institution or idea."<sup>2</sup> The anti movement, on the other hand, he defined as the rhetorical attempt "...to

arouse public opinion to the destruction of an existing institution or idea."<sup>3</sup> Further, Griffin believed that each of these two types of rhetorical movements would produce specific types of rhetoricians and journalists. Griffin believed that a pro movement would produce aggressor orators and journalists who would attempt, through rhetoric, to establish reform. Likewise, Griffin believed that an anti movement would produce aggressor orators and journalists who would use rhetoric as a means of destroying some existing institution.

Griffin posited that there are three phases in the rhetorical development of historical movements: the period of inception, the period of rhetorical crisis, and the period of consummation. Griffin described the period of inception as: "A time when the roots of a pre-existing sentiment, nourished by interested rhetoricians, begins to flower into public notice."<sup>4</sup> Further, the period of inception is marked by the occurrence of some striking event that results in the creation of a body of aggressor rhetoricians, which is sufficient to the initiation of the movement.

The period of rhetorical crisis, as defined by Griffin, begins when one of the two opposing groups of rhetoricians, aggressor or defendant, is successful "...in irrevocably disturbing the balance between the groups which had existed in the mind of the collective audience."<sup>5</sup> This disturbance can be caused through several means; new arguments can be

initiated, additional channels can be employed by one of the two sides, or existing channels can be flooded "...with a moving tide of discourse."<sup>6</sup>

Griffin described the period of consummation as "...a time when the great proportion of aggressor rhetoricians abandon their efforts."<sup>7</sup> He suggested two general reasons as to why aggressor rhetors might abandon their efforts. The first reason might be the fact that they believe their cause to be won. The second reason might stem from their belief that they have gradually come to the conclusion that their cause is either lost or useless.

After reviewing a body of research centered on the rhetoric of the American Antislavery Movement, I have identified aspects of the rhetoric of this specific movement which comply with and, therefore, tend to confirm some of Griffin's assertions. However, I have also identified certain aspects of the rhetoric of the antislavery movement which call into question at least one of the claims which Griffin makes about the rhetoric of historical movements.

The purpose of this report is to use Griffin's model as a means of organizing for review the research studies so far conducted into the rhetoric of the Antislavery Movement to use the collected body of antislavery rhetorical research as a means of testing the projections expressed by Griffin in his third research question. I will present this report in the chronological order of the rhetorical life of a historical

movement as projected by Griffin, beginning with the period of inception and ending with the period of consummation. In doing so, I will discuss the various aggressor and defendant rhetors and journalists as they chronologically figure into the various periods of the rhetorical life of this historical movement. Then I will offer my own criticism and conclusions regarding both the strengths and weaknesses of the collected antislavery rhetorical research, and those of Griffin's model of historical movement.

#### PERIOD OF INCEPTION

Griffin stated in 1952 that a period of inception occurs when "...the roots of a pre-existing sentiment, nourished by interested rhetoricians, begin to flower into public notice, or when some striking event occurs which immediately creates a host of aggressor rhetoricians."<sup>8</sup> This quotation effectively describes the inceptional period of the antislavery movement as described by the body of research reviewed for this report.

The body of aggressor rhetors who joined the ranks of the American Antislavery Movement during its period of inception was diverse. It included both abolitionists and colonizationists, whites and blacks, men and women. All of the aggressor rhetors joined the movement for their own specific reasons. The white abolitionists joined to end slavery in America. The colonizationists joined for the purpose of returning the slaves to Africa. The free blacks joined for

the purpose of fighting for both their own equality and that of their fellow blacks still held in bondage. The women joined because the antislavery platform allowed them, for the first time, an opportunity to openly speak out on an American social issue. In addition to the various aggressor rhetors, the American Antislavery Movement also attracted a body of defendant rhetors, all of whom were principally white southern males. In my discussion of the period of inception of the American Antislavery Movement, I will, in more detail, discuss each of the different groups of rhetors that joined the American Antislavery Movement during the period of inception; explaining the aims, goals and motives of each of the different groups of rhetors. I will begin my study of the period of inception of the American Antislavery Movement with a discussion of the abolitionist debate, which took place at Lane Seminary in 1833.

Regarding the origins of white antislavery activity in the United States, Paul A. Carmack has written that a series of debates centered on the issue of slavery was begun by theology students attending Lane Seminary in 1833. Carmack stated that the Lane Debates "...spread widening circles of influence that led to the war which dissolved slavery."<sup>9</sup> Carmack pointed out the significance of the goals and aims of the Lane debates by stating, "Until this time, efforts of the abolitionists had not been coordinated or defined in direction."<sup>10</sup> From this particular branch of the abolitionist



movement would emerge aspiring theologians in training for hands-on experience in the field of social activism.

At Lane Seminary, with the need for the abolition of slavery already agreed upon, the students turned their thoughts to the first topic of debate; "Ought the people of slave holding states abolish slavery immediately?"<sup>11</sup> The second topic for debate at Lane was the colonization movement. Regarding the newly founded colonization movement, the students debated "...the merits of colonization as a means of settling the slavery problem."<sup>12</sup> When the students put the issue to a vote, only one student voted in favor of accepting the policies sponsored by the American Colonization Society.

While Carmack's essay on the debate activities at Lane tells us, in terms of the two major topics of debate, something in regard to the history of the Lane faction of the antislavery movement, it tells us nothing at all about the rhetoric of the Lane students. This is one weakness of Carmack's essay; it is a historical account of a movement, not a rhetorical account of a movement. In an attempt to emphasize this point, I shall briefly discuss the example offered by the Lane career of Theodore Weld. Weld, who would soon emerge as one of the leading abolitionists, attended Lane during this period and was a major figure in the abolitionist activity there. However, Carmack fails to discuss Weld's rhetorical activity at Lane in favor of a discussion of his other deeds and actions performed while attending the

seminary. Carmack mentions that Weld, while attending Lane, was one of the signers of a letter to the American Colonization Society, asking that organization to explain its actions. Also, Carmack states that Weld played a role in persuading former members of New York's Oneida Commune to attend Lane Seminary.

In contrast with the white male abolitionists, the colonizationists in the antislavery movement were in favor of freedom for the blacks only if it resulted in their return to Africa. The American Colonization Society was the organization that served as the focal point for the colonization movement. The official doctrine of the American Colonization movement maintained that the Christian salvation of the slaves was only part of God's divine plan, emphasizing that "...providence wanted nothing less than the conversion of all on the dark continent."<sup>13</sup> Many celebrated Americans believed in the cause of colonization. Among them was Daniel Webster. Webster believed that the Christianized black, upon his return to Africa, was superior to his ancestors and was "...infinitely more advanced in all that makes him a respectable human being."<sup>14</sup> At the 1852 National Convention of the American Colonization Society, a clergyman by the name of Slaughter echoed Webster when he said that slavery, by putting blacks in contact with Christian society, had raised the black race up "...the scale of intellectual and moral improvement."<sup>15</sup> Reverend John Pease, in an attempt to persuade others of the

good of the colonization movement, told the story of a former slave who had decided to go to Liberia and "...was ready to go back to his native land and preach Christ, in his old age to his heathen brethren."<sup>16</sup>

In addition to Webster, other noted Americans supported the efforts of the American Colonization Society. Among these Americans were Millard Filmore and Henry Clay. Filmore wrote that the successful efforts of the society "...made the black the bearer of civilization and Christianity to the benighted regions of heathen. May God in his mercy both to the white and black smile upon their efforts."<sup>17</sup> Reverend Walter Clark, a member of the society, confirmed his belief in the colonizationist cause when he said, "And this is the reason that these children of Ham are away from home --- they are away at school --- America is one of his [God's] appointed boarding schools for his sons and daughters."<sup>18</sup> Henry Clay, United States Senator and President of the society, endorsed colonization when he said "... all the attributes of civilization, of Christianity, of arts, was Africa's reward for any injuries her people suffered under slavery."<sup>19</sup> Clay also favored colonization for another reason; the corrupt influence of the free blacks on the slaves. In a speech given in 1851 at the annual meeting of the American Colonization Society, Clay said, "Indeed every species of irregularity results from the intercourse between the more dissolute portion of the people of color and the slaves in the slave holding states."<sup>20</sup>

Although the studies reviewed here provide no evidence of organized white abolitionist activity in the United States until the 1830's, at least one does indicate that there was black opposition to slavery in this country long before whites organized any antislavery societies or debates. Robert C. Dick has written of the antislavery activities of Benjamin Banneker who delivered one of the first "...recorded negro speeches of protest in 1789."<sup>21</sup> Prior to 1800, members of the black clergy began to denounce slavery from the pulpit. Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, publicly spoke out against slavery in his Sunday morning sermons. Prince Hall, a black Methodist minister who was also the founder of Negro Free Masonry, did the same. Further, Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey, three of the leading black militants of the nineteenth century, all were known to conduct secret religious meetings which "...justified slave revolutions on religious grounds."<sup>22</sup>

According to Arthur L. Smith, one of the primary concerns of black rhetors prior to the founding of the abolitionist movement was "...the development of black eloquence."<sup>23</sup> Due to two primary reasons, the early black American rhetors received frequent practice in the art of public speaking. The first reason was the need for blacks to speak out and defend themselves as human beings while, at the same time, demanding their equal rights. The second reason was the need for the

correction of false assumptions, initiated by whites, regarding blacks.

Of the early black rhetors, perhaps Peter Williams was the most significant. In 1808, Williams presented a speech entitled "The Abolition of the Slave Trade". In the speech, Williams, an Episcopal rector from New York City, harshly denounced slavery and its supporters. Williams would eventually agree to tone down his sermons rather than risk enraging the proslavery members of his denomination. In the final analysis, Williams, in his "Abolition of the Slave Trade" speech, expressed the perspective of a man who knew that the situation for blacks in America would eventually have to get better simply for the fact that no human condition was worse than that of slavery.

In 1817, with the advent of colonizationist sentiment, black militancy increased in America. Less than one month after the establishment of the American Colonizationist Society "...the free negro speakers of Richmond and Philadelphia militantly expressed their opposition."<sup>24</sup> Further, according to Dick, there were three events that were crucial in marking the upsurge of black militancy. The first was Walker's Appeal, a blistering attack on slavery which "...called for revolution by those persons held in bondage."<sup>25</sup> The second event was William Lloyd Garrison's publication of his abolitionist newspaper The Liberator. The third was Nat Turner's slave rebellion in Southhampton County, Virginia.

With the origination of the first antislavery societies in the 1830's, blacks were slowly but steadily brought into the ranks of white abolitionist activity. By 1840, several blacks had entered into the white societies as agents, speaking in various regions of the country. The black inclusion into the white societies was a success. Of this success, Dick wrote that by the end of the 1830's "...the national colored organizations were gone and their members integrated into the national white societies."<sup>26</sup>

The early black rhetors, in their fight to end slavery, employed arguments which ranged from the basis of morality to the economic refutation of slavery. From the basis of morality, a major black argument proposed that those "...not involved in the crusade were...indifferent to sin and morally reprobate."<sup>27</sup> Further, black rhetors were quick to remind their fellow blacks that the only way for blacks to successfully combat the institution of slavery was through clean living and moral lives, thus setting an example, which through contrast would reveal slavery as the evil institution that it truly was. Arguing from the basis of legality, blacks claimed that, by birthright, they were Americans and entitled to the full rights of citizenship. They argued that slavery "...denied blacks the right of legal protection, subjecting slaves to the restrictions and penalties of the law without any benefits of it."<sup>28</sup> Black argument from the basis of history found its strength in the words and phrases of the

Declaration of Independence. Based on the fact that blacks shed their blood in the American Revolution in the attempt to realize the dream of freedom, they concluded that "...black men were entitled to the liberty that revolution bought."<sup>29</sup> Finally, black leaders issued an economic refutation of the institution of slavery. These black rhetors argued that "...bondage encouraged indolence among the slaves robbing them of energy and initiative."<sup>30</sup> Further, the black leaders maintained that, upon being given freedom in terms of both personal and economic equality, the blacks, as well as their white employers, would "...reap a greater harvest."<sup>31</sup>

While the white males of the abolitionist movement, along with their free black counterparts and the white rhetors of the colonizationist movement, were allowed (due to the fact that they were men) to openly speak out against slavery and other social controversies of the nineteenth century, the women, until this time, were not so fortunate. The women of the nineteenth century lived in a world in which they had no place to truly call their own. While the men's sphere extended into the real world, the women's sphere was limited to the home. The women were taught from childhood to believe that marriage, children, and the home were the major goals of their lives. In short, the professions, as we know them today, were closed to the women of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, lacking the power of the vote, women had no political life. However, a small minority of women, armed

with courage, initiative and bravery, chose to cross the threshold of established tradition and challenge the restrictions of a society that was controlled by men. In retrospect, it is easy to understand why women naturally gravitated towards the abolitionist faction of the antislavery movement. Although women were not owned by men, they were economically and politically bound in a form of slavery. Certainly, women of this period had come to view themselves as the property of their husbands and, in doing so, recognized a similar oppression to that of blacks in America. Through their involvement in the abolitionist movement, a move that was both condoned and encouraged by the men in the movement, women received their first political exposure. It was through this exposure that the women would eventually begin to demand for themselves the very same privileges and rights that they were demanding for the black slaves in the South.

Frances Wright was a wealthy, well educated woman from Scotland who settled in America in 1824. She came to America believing that she could play a role in effecting change regarding slavery in America. In the town of Nashoba, Tennessee, "...she founded [a] well planned but short lived community for the gradual emancipation of the slaves."<sup>32</sup> Wright officially entered the abolitionist movement when she chose to effect change through two means of rhetorical communication, public speaking and newspaper editorials. In 1828-29, she toured the country speaking in many major cities



and small towns. Along with Robert Dale Owen, she co-edited the New York Enquirer from 1829 to 1830. Wright began her public speaking career in July of 1828 when she made a patriotic appeal in the town of New Harmony. While in New Harmony, she also served as the editor of the New Harmony Gazette, using it as a means of communicating her social and political views.

During this period, Sojourner Truth and Maria Miller Stewart, two black women, entered the abolitionist movement. Truth, a former slave, entered the movement in Massachusetts in 1843. She favored the Bible as the basis for her rhetorical argument against slavery. She expanded her abolitionist career in 1851 when she made "...an extended tour of western New York with other distinguished abolitionists."<sup>33</sup>

Like Truth, Maria Miller Stewart also used biblical allusion in order to raise a new "group consciousness" among her fellow abolitionists. Addressing the need for black participation in the movement, Miller once echoed Christ's command for Lazarus to rise from the grave saying, "O ye fearful ones, throw off your fearfulness and come forth in the name of the Lord and in the strength of the God of justice and make yourselves active members of society."<sup>34</sup>

Angelina Grimké hailed from South Carolina, where she "...came to view the institution of slavery and even traditional practices of it in her own home with abhorrence."<sup>35</sup> This rejection of southern values caused Grimké to reject her

family's Episcopalian faith for the Quaker religion. In August of 1835, Grimké wrote a crucial letter, one which led her to enter the abolitionist movement, to William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison was so inspired by the letter that he promptly ran it in his abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator. Grimké's letter, a response to an appeal issued by Garrison, praised Garrison and his fellow abolitionists. In her letter, Grimké wrote, "This is a cause worth dying for. I say so from what I have seen and heard in a land of slavery where rests the darkness of Egypt."<sup>36</sup> Encouraged by both Garrison and Theodore Weld, Grimké began to speak before women's groups. One of the fundamental themes of Grimké's rhetorical message was her conviction that "[a]s a former Southerner and slave holder, she had a unique message for Northern audiences and a God given responsibility share that message."<sup>37</sup>

While most of the research concerning the rhetoric of the antislavery movement is centered on the efforts of the aggressor rhetors, only one article has been produced regarding the rhetoric of the defendant rhetors. The defendant rhetors of the American Antislavery Movement were primarily white, male, and Southern. The white Southern defendant rhetors, in their rhetoric rhetorical defense of slavery, presented a series of arguments ranging from the belief that the abolition of slavery would spell an end in the South to the belief that blacks were better off remaining as slaves than becoming free men and women. Another series of Southern proslavery argu-

ments stemmed from a common fear that abolition would destroy the South and the general belief that emancipation would fail.

The prospect of emancipation for the blacks was a mind boggling concept for most Southerners to comprehend; "...emancipation, they prophesied, would destroy the South."<sup>38</sup> Southerners believed that emancipation would result in the destruction of the South due to the idleness of unattended blacks in the work force. Governor Hammond of Georgia wrote that "...the effects of emancipation...would leave animals unattended while [ears] of corn rotted in the fields."<sup>39</sup>

The Southerners also argued that freedom for the slaves would result in civil war amongst the races. Because of this, they believed that the South should deny freedom to the slaves in order to protect its culture and its civilization. Furthermore, white Southerners believed that a race war would "...certainly cause his [the black's] utter degradation."<sup>40</sup>

The proslavery Southerners also argued that the slaves were happy in their situations. The basic argument made the claim that emancipation could not take place without the newly freed slaves being cast into a world in which they would be reduced to poverty. Governor Hammond wrote, "I believe our slaves are the happiest three million of human beings on whom the sun shines."<sup>41</sup> Clearly, the Southerners, through their rhetoric, strove to portray the slaves as beings who were happy, content and secure---thanks to the institution of slavery. In the words of one Southerner, the slave was

"...better off than his free counterpart in the North and in the South."<sup>42</sup>

Another argument employed by Southerners was the claim that the blacks were racially inferior to the whites, and therefore, slavery was justified. Senator Toombs of Georgia stated tersely that, "...the white is the superior race and the black the inferior."<sup>43</sup> A Southern author wrote that the blacks in America were "...utterly uncivilized and debased, how can they begin to improve? If, in two-thousand years and upwards, they have made no progress, how much will they have made in two-hundred thousand years?"<sup>44</sup>

In an attempt to make the argument that intellectual equality amongst the races was not possible, one proslavery rhetor stated that history had been "...ransacked for examples but they were nowhere to be found."<sup>45</sup> In an attempt to place a religious spin on the argument supporting intellectual inequality amongst the races, Chancellor Harper stated "...the creator did not intend that every human being should be highly cultivated morally and intellectually, for, as we have seen, he has imposed conditions on society which would render this impossible."<sup>46</sup>

In review, the body of research produced concerning the rhetoric of the antislavery movement has revealed certain facts about the rhetors who began the movement during its period of inception. The research has revealed that each of the different groups of rhetors joined the movement for

different reasons. The white abolitionists joined for the purpose of ending slavery. The black abolitionists joined not only to end slavery, but also to fight for the equality of their fellow blacks. The colonizationists joined for the purpose of freeing the slaves in favor returning them to Africa. The women came into the movement in order to take advantage of their first opportunity on a national social and political issue. Finally, the white Southern defendant rhetors came to the movement in order to speak in favor of slavery, an institution that was a major economic backbone of Southern society.

#### PERIOD OF RHETORICAL CRISIS

Griffin wrote that the crisis period of a historical movement occurs when "...one of the opposing groups of rhetoricians succeeds in irrevocably disturbing the balance between the groups that had existed in the mind of the collective audience..."<sup>47</sup> Current research into the rhetoric of the antislavery movement strongly indicates that a period of rhetorical crisis did occur in this particular movement. However, the rhetorical crisis period experienced by the antislavery movement did not occur in the manner that Griffin had predicted. Griffin predicted that a movement's rhetorical crisis period would be triggered by conflict with its counter-movement. However, the anti-slavery movement's rhetorical crisis period, which the antislavery movement was headed for prior to the Civil War, was internal rather than external.

The black abolitionists could not agree whether or not to select the route of moral suasion, political suasion, colonization or armed insurrection. The women of the abolitionist movement, on the other hand, used the abolitionist platform as the soapbox from which the women's movement was launched. Needless to say, this decision caused disturbances amongst the white male rhetors of the abolitionist movement, who believed the abolition of slavery to be the highest of the two goals. Other white male abolitionists, such as George Washington Julian and John Brown, advocated violence as a means of ending slavery. Finally, the colonizationists favored an end to slavery in America which would result in the return of the newly freed slaves to Africa. There is no indication that the efforts of the defendant rhetors, who sought to preserve slavery, did anything to damage the image that the American Antislavery Movement presented to the American public. The greatest damage to the efforts of the aggressor rhetors came from the failure of these rhetors to agree upon goals and aims and, therefore, present a common, united front.

Of the white male abolitionists who favored violence, perhaps the most intriguing and least well known was George Washington Julian. Julian, an abolitionist Congressman from Indiana, believed that he was nothing less than a spokesman, selected by God, for the purpose of a divine mission. Julian believed that his mission consisted of presenting "...facts and arguments about evil institutions [slavery] in order to

enlighten people and stimulate them to overthrow those institutions."<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the most extreme notion asserted by Julian was his belief that violence should be employed by whites, rather than moral or political suasion, as a means of bringing an end to slavery in the United States. Julian used the political arena to call for "...an end to the Union and even a Civil War if slavery were not abolished."<sup>49</sup>

John Brown of Kansas was another abolitionist who, like Julian, supported the use of violence as a means of ending slavery. Unlike Julian, Brown openly took part in violent antislavery activities. Perhaps the strongest common bond shared by Brown and Julian was the use of biblical authority as a basis for antislavery rhetorical argument. Brown, on trial for his life and attempting to justify his actions at Harper's Ferry, said of the Christian Bible, "It teaches me further to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them. I endeavored to act upon that instruction."<sup>50</sup>

Henry David Thoreau, like both Brown and Julian, was an abolitionist whose rhetorical strategy was built on the foundation of religiously oriented authority. However, Thoreau, the father of civil disobedience, advocated passive resistance rather than violence. Thoreau publicly spoke out against the evils of slavery on July 4, 1854, at Farmingham, Massachusetts. The moral basis of Thoreau's speech was rooted in the philosophy of Transcendentalism, which advocated the "...immanence of...[a]...God and faith in insight derived from

original intuition."<sup>51</sup> According to Alfred A. Funk, this philosophy laid the basis for the belief in the inalienable worth of an individual. Further, Funk stated that this philosophy set Thoreau's belief that no human being should be placed in a position, due to coercion of either the state or society, contrary to his or her natural state of freedom.

The women rhetors of the antislavery movement, although initially welcomed by the likes of Garrison and Weld, placed the abolitionist camp in a state of rhetorical crisis when they insisted upon using the abolitionist movement as the rhetorical platform from which to launch the American feminist movement.

Frances Wright used the abolitionist platform to shed light on the fact that the education of women in America had been neglected. She demanded that her largely male audiences act "...to remove the evils of inequality, first from the minds of women, then from their condition, and then from your laws."<sup>52</sup> Wright also argued from historical fact when discussing the issue of education for women, citing "...the Declaration of Independence with its pronouncements of equality to persuade her listeners that women should have education."<sup>53</sup>

Sojourner Truth elected to combine her slavery experience with the experience of her sex in her use of the abolitionist cause as a platform for demanding equal rights for women. Speaking of her slavery experience, Truth said, "I have born thirteen children and seen them almost all sold off to slavery



and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me."<sup>54</sup> Further, Truth used her slavery experience to prove that women were the sexual equals of men when she said, "An a'n't I a woman? Look at me...I have slaved and planted and gathered into barns, an[d] no man could hear me. An a'n't I a woman?"<sup>55</sup> Finally, Truth would employ rhetoric in order to prove the equality of women by asking the men of her audience, "Where did your Christ come from?...from God and woman! Man had nothing to do with him."<sup>56</sup>

Of the women abolitionists who elected to argue from the basis of biblical authority, Angelina Grimké was, perhaps, the one woman who made the greatest use of this type of argument. Grimké chose the persona of Esther, a Hebrew slave who appeared before the King of Persia to plead for the lives of her fellow slaves. Grimké believed that the slavery issue was every bit as serious as the crisis that her biblical role model had faced. She defended her rhetorical choice by stating, "Here then, is one alternative, and just as tremendous an alternative as that which was presented to the Queen of Persia."<sup>57</sup>

In May of 1838, Grimké spoke in Philadelphia, this time modeling her rhetoric after the personae of Jesus and the prophet Isaiah. Paraphrasing the words of Jesus, Grimké stated, "There is no such thing as neutral ground, he that is not for us is against us and he that gather not with us, scattereth abroad."<sup>58</sup> Turning to the second rhetorical example

of Isaiah, Grimké spoke of her mission of uncovering the sins of slavery, "I will lift my voice like a trumpet and show this people their transgression, their sin of omission against the slave."<sup>59</sup>

Phyliss M. Japp concluded that Grimké's choice of using the rhetorical role models of Esther, Isaiah and Jesus was symbolic of the conflicting definitions of what woman was then and is today. Japp states that Grimké, in the role of Esther, was a woman who was controlled by the scene in which she lived. On the other hand, Japp concluded that Grimké through the rhetorical role models of either Jesus or Isaiah, was attempting to portray herself as a woman who controlled the scene in which she lived.

Grimké's future husband, Theodore Weld, was well aware of her rhetorical intentions. Weld's stance on the issue of women's rights was complex. Weld "...insisted that women's rights should remain subordinate to abolition. He defined both as human rights, but he believed that abolition was the larger issue and subsumed women's rights."<sup>60</sup> Weld wrote to Grimké concerning her fight for women's rights, saying:

Let us first wake up the nation to lift millions of slaves of both sexes from the dust and turn them into MEN and then we will have our hands in. It will be an easy matter to take millions of females from their knees and set them on their feet, or in other words, transform them from babies into women.<sup>61</sup>

When Grimké continued to speak out for women's rights, Weld wrote an angry letter to her. In the letter, Weld made a lengthy tirade in which he concluded:

Your women's rights. You put the cart before the horse, you drag the tree by the top in attempt to push your women's rights...I have left unsaid most that I have designed. Among other things, 20 different reasons why you should let alone women's rights.<sup>62</sup>

In the final analysis, the men who had welcomed the women to the forefront of the abolitionist movement for the purpose of crusading for the rights of blacks were the very same men who feared the women's use of the abolitionist platform for the purpose of advancing women's rights. These men were "...fearful for the cohesiveness of the abolitionist movement."<sup>63</sup> The men of the abolitionist movement held the belief that, "To join the women's rights question to that of the antislavery issue would alienate as many adherents as it might attract and would also divert the energies of the abolitionists."<sup>64</sup>

The greatest problem experienced by the black rhetors of the abolitionist movement was the failure of its leaders to agree on goals and aims. In 1836, the National Negro Convention "...dissolved because of dissension among the leaders."<sup>65</sup> Some of the leaders favored colonization while others believed that "...they should stress the need for equality within the United States itself."<sup>66</sup> Others believed that black leaders should speak in favor of total integration into American

society. Further, others favored a policy of segregation in regard to churches and public schools.

Furthermore, the black leaders of the National Negro Convention were split over what approach was to be taken in regard to the question of abolition. Some favored a political approach to the problem while others desired to "...stay exclusively with the Garrisonian doctrine of moral suasion."<sup>67</sup> A crucial issue was that of moral suasion versus violence or insurrection. Over this issue, the National Negro Convention was divided. One of the black abolitionists who advocated moral and political suasion was Frederick Douglass.

Douglass, a fugitive slave in the eyes of Southerners, first rose to national attention with the publication of his autobiography, an account of his life as a slave. While speaking in Great Britain in 1845, Douglass, due to the attention gained through the publication of his book, had little trouble attracting an audience. In addition to drawing large crowds, Douglass, through his rhetoric, "...converted non-abolitionists and inspired local antislavery societies."<sup>68</sup> In Ireland, reactions to Douglass were positive. Jane Jennings, noting the interest directed toward Douglass by members of the Church of England, wrote American Garrisonians saying "...never before have I known anyone who has excited such general interest as Frederick."<sup>69</sup> Regarding the persuasive powers of Douglass, Isabel Jennings wrote, "We think we have got contributions from persons ...who never could have

been influenced except by a person who himself had suffered."<sup>70</sup> While speaking in Great Britain, Douglass employed two major rhetorical themes. The first theme took to task the moral impotence of the United States. Through this theme, Douglass reminded the Irish that it was their duty as Christians to turn the tide of Irish public opinion against American slave owners and clerical apologists. The second theme was concerned with blaming American society and culture for creating the myth of black inferiority and for preventing blacks from growing in terms of educational, economical and cultural opportunities and development.

In 1854, Douglass began to speak out against the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The act would allow for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, which allowed for a balanced entry of slave and free states into the Union. Douglass decided to attack the act through a series of editorials which he ran in his newspaper. The theme of the editorials was centered on the rhetorical strategies of antislavery Senators Seward, Sumner and Chase. In the editorials, Douglass charged that the Senators, through their rhetorical strategy of attacking the possible repeal of the Missouri Compromise, were not focused on the basic issue of controversy. Douglass claimed that the antislavery Senators should instead focus on the obvious danger presented by the possible passage of the act--the tightening of slavery's "...grasp on the largest and most desirable portion of the nation."<sup>71</sup> Further, Douglass

stepped up his editorial attacks by demanding that the antislavery Senators do everything in their power to kill the bill, branding Senator Stephan Douglas as traitor to both the North and the cause of freedom, and accusing New England clergymen, who happened to be in favor of the act, of total ignorance. Due to the efforts of black leaders and rhetors such as Douglass, most blacks abandoned violent insurrection as a weapon. One, however, openly favored it.

In 1843, Henry Highlands Garnet, a black Presbyterian and antislavery rhetor, made a significant address on the issue of abolition at the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo, New York. Garnet's immediate audience in Buffalo consisted of the "...educated elite of the free negroes who were dedicated to raising the black race from slavery."<sup>72</sup> His potential audience consisted of "...the four million slaves in America."<sup>73</sup>

It must be realized that, until Garnet delivered his speech, none of his contemporaries "...realized the radical views that he held."<sup>74</sup> Garnet had three reasons for speaking at the convention. First, he wanted to declare his belief that the annual conventions did little to actually bring about an end to slavery. Second, he wanted to expand upon the need for the spread of the philosophy of "militant crusading". Third, Garnet wanted to offer a message of hope by stating "...Brethren, the time has come when you must act for yourselves. If hereditary bondmen would be free, they must

themselves strike the first blow...it is in your power so to torment the God cursed slave holder."<sup>75</sup>

I believe that Garnet's speech was, in many ways, a forerunner of the 1960's black militant rhetoric. Garnet insisted that change must be effected immediately, that the consequences were of little importance, and that violence was the only means to that end. Although the basis of his speech was his belief that the consequence of militant action did not matter, Garnet's militant philosophy differed from that of 1960's black militants in that he suggested that the initial course for the slaves was not that of violence but diplomacy. He suggested to the slaves that they should first approach their owners and "...tell them plainly that you intend to be free...tell them plainly that they have no more right to oppress you than you have to enslave them."<sup>76</sup> Garnet supported this strategy by stating, "If the scale was turned, and black men were the masters and white men the slaves every destructive agent and element would be employed to lay the oppressor low."<sup>77</sup> If he made clear his belief that violence should be used only if the owner refused the slaves' request for freedom, he also made clear his belief that the use of all means available to the slaves, be they physical or intellectual, in attempt to gain their freedom, was "...a solemn and imperative duty."<sup>78</sup>

Although they shared with the abolitionists the common belief that the slaves should be freed, the members of the

colonization movement did not view emancipation as a means to that end. Some believed that blacks, because of the belief that they were racially inferior to whites, would be returned to Africa. Henry Clay cited the basis of nature and providence as grounds for the denial of equality to blacks: "...from the nature of our feelings and prejudice, if you please, they [blacks] can never be incorporated and stand on any equal platform."<sup>79</sup> Still others, such as James G. Birney, believed that blacks should be freed and returned to Africa because of the belief that they would never receive equality in the United States. Birney, in an article which was reprinted in Frederick Douglass' abolitionist newspaper, the North Star, wrote:

I became, and am now, the favorer of voluntary emigration to Liberia...[because of]...the oppressive treatment of the colored people by the whites...one that has kept even pace with every attempt permanently to benefit them, and one which I apprehend, will be continued and aggravated till they consent to emigrate.<sup>80</sup>

Other colonizationists believed that the blacks, who had been denied the opportunities that had been granted to whites in America, should be allowed the opportunities to self govern, rise economically, and prosper and build a society in Africa. These colonizationists spoke of "...the returning African in Liberia as a success in religion and religious conversion in business and in government."<sup>81</sup> A Protestant minister by the name of Humphrey stated his belief in forced emigration by saying, "The more enlightened and respectable



they might become, the more keenly would they feel their hopeless disabilities."<sup>82</sup> Stanton, of Tennessee, echoed Humphrey when he said that the black man in America was... deprived of social equality and generally of political rights...they will germinate and expand there [in Africa].."<sup>83</sup> A cleric by the name of Ruffner, who supported the efforts of the colonization movement, proclaimed, "Their intelligence, freedom and religion flourish among the descendants of Ham... among the much maligned Ethiopian race. What right have we (will they argue) to allow these people to exist among us in such ignorance and degradation when they have in them the germ of so fine a development."<sup>84</sup>

The body of research produced regarding the rhetorical crisis period of the American Antislavery Movement has produced facts concerning the movement which do not comply with Griffin's projections for this period of a historical movement. The aggressor rhetors of the American Antislavery Movement did not enter into a period of rhetorical crisis, which was the result of the efforts of opposing or defendant rhetors. Instead, the aggressor rhetors of the American Antislavery Movement were headed towards a period of rhetorical crisis that was the direct result of their collective failure to agree on common aims and goals and unite in a war against slavery in America. However, before the internally triggered rhetorical crisis period could take effect, the Civil War began. As a result, we will never know whether the

rhetorical crisis period of the American Antislavery Movement would have been internally triggered or not. While some of the white male rhetors openly favored violence as a means of bringing an end to slavery, others, Thoreau for one, called for civil disobedience. Some of the black rhetors favored policies of segregation and colonization. Other black rhetors were divided over the policy of political and moral suasion versus violence. The women of the abolitionist camp, because they used the abolitionist platform to call for women's rights, created a schism between themselves and the men of that camp, who believed that the abolition of slavery was the higher of the two goals. The colonizationists, on the other hand, remained in favor of freedom for the slaves only if it resulted in their return to Africa. While Griffin's projections for the rhetorical crisis period of a historical movement, in the case of the American Antislavery Movement, were short-circuited by the Civil War and could neither be proven or disproven, his projections regarding the period of consummation were correct.

## PERIOD OF CONSUMMATION

Griffin wrote that the period of consummation occurs when the "...aggressor rhetors abandon their efforts."<sup>85</sup> This abandonment of effort occurs when the aggressor rhetors come to believe that their cause is either won or lost. The anti-slavery movement reached its heights in the years immediately prior to the Civil War. The body of research regarding the rhetoric of the antislavery movement, which I have reviewed for this report, offers no information concerning the consummation period of this particular movement. I can only speculate as to when the American Antislavery Movement entered into its period of consummation. However, I can draw the logical conclusion that the antislavery rhetors had abandoned their efforts by April 9, 1865, when Lee surrendered to Grant, bringing an end to the Civil War.

I believe that the antislavery movement, and the rhetoric it produced, played a pivotal role in the chain of events that greatly altered and shaped the history of the United States. However, for such an important movement, I was disappointed to discover that such a fragmented body of research has been produced regarding its rhetoric. My general criticisms are rooted not so much in Griffin's model but in the fragmented body of research, which at times fails to account for several portions of the rhetorical history of the antislavery movement. Along with my criticisms, I will also offer sugges-

tions regarding what can be done to correct the problems that those critics address.

#### CRITICISMS AND CONCLUSIONS

I was disappointed to discover that no articles had been written concerning the rhetoric of many of the major antislavery rhetors. For example, not one article or book had been produced which dealt solely with the rhetoric of either Garrison or Weld. Nor were there any published articles concerning the rhetoric of such black militants as Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey. These were men who struck fear into the hearts of Southerners and yet no articles have been produced concerning their rhetoric. Thus, the rhetorical history of the antislavery movement is far from complete.

Despite this fact, I found that the portion of my research that was devoted to the women abolitionists of the antislavery movement went into sound detail. The Yoakam article did an especially fine job of taking the pulse of the women's faction of the abolitionist movement by discussing the contributions of each of the major rhetors. I was pleased with the number of articles that I was able to find regarding the women rhetors. I believe that the number of articles concerning this faction of the antislavery movement, and the women's movement that it fostered, will continue to grow and expand.

A review of rhetorical studies that have investigated the antislavery movement also sheds light on Griffin's claim

that movements progress through distinct rhetorical stages.

My only criticism regarding the period of inception stems from one crucial flaw that is inherent in the body of antislavery research, the fact that there are no studies of the organizational efforts of the defendant rhetors during the inceptional period of the antislavery movement. The one logical conclusion that I can draw is that the defendant rhetors of this given movement might have started to organize and become active in the late 1700's. I say this because, according to Robert C. Dick, in 1789 Benjamin Banneker gave one of the first Negro speeches against slavery. This is a significant fact. According to the available research, this is the earliest incident of antislavery rhetoric. Following this flow of logic, it is quite possible that Banneker's aggressor rhetoric could have provoked a defendant response.

The conclusion that I propose for the correction of this problem is simple but tedious. I propose that some scholar in the field, one having an interest in the rhetoric of social movement, take it upon him or herself to consult the history books that have been written concerning the antislavery movement, and make an attempt to determine the time of the inception of the defendant rhetor camp of the antislavery movement. When this task is completed, we might come away with a better understanding of the defendant rhetors of the antislavery movement. I must confess that I have done some preliminary research into this area. In their book, The Antislavery

Argument, William and Jane Pease stated that antislavery activity in America began in 1748 when Anthony Benezet, a Philadelphia Quaker, published an attack on slavery. Pease and Pease also state that in 1775, "The first Quaker anti-slavery society, the Society for the Relief of Negroes Held in Bondage, was organized in Philadelphia."<sup>86</sup> It is possible that the aggressor rhetoric of both Benezet and the members of the Quaker society provoked a defendant response. I would also like to add that, because this book was a collection of antislavery essays and speeches and did not include conclusions and criticisms from those in the field of speech and rhetoric, I did not deem it proper to include any portion of the book in my body of research. However, the book does suit a purpose; its very contents cause me to conclude that there might have been some rhetorical activity in the defendant camp of the antislavery movement due to the provocation resulting from the combined efforts of Benezet in 1748 and the Quaker Society in 1775.

In regard to the period of rhetorical crisis, the available research suggests that the potential for rhetorical crisis in the antislavery movement was not instigated by external pressure, as Griffin predicted, but by inner turmoil and the failure of the antislavery rhetors to put aside their differences, focus on their shared beliefs, and build a united front on the foundations of common ground. Griffin may have been correct in supposing that most rhetorical movements do

actually meet with a rhetorical crisis, which is caused by outside pressure provided by opposing rhetors, not by turmoil from within. However, the evidence provided by my body of research leads me to conclude that the antislavery movement at the time of the outbreak of the Civil War was headed for an internally instigated period of rhetorical crisis. Thus, the available research provides a warrant for questioning Griffin's original concept of how movements reach their "rhetorical crisis stage." What I propose as a remedy for this problem is simple. I propose that this portion of Griffin's theory be revised to accommodate the possibility of an internally initiated rhetorical crisis.

As for the period of consummation, I found that the available body of research regarding the rhetoric of the antislavery movement presents an interesting problem. Although Griffin wrote that the period of consummation occurs with the abandonment of effort by aggressor rhetors due to the fact that they have begun to view their cause as being either won or useless, this group of studies offers no indication as to when, exactly, the antislavery movement ended. The mystery lies in the fact that no mention whatsoever is made in any of the articles in my body of research to indicate any antislavery activity during the Civil War years. Although I can easily draw the conclusion that the antislavery movement ended with the fall of the South in 1865, is this actually the case? I believe that the failure of existing studies to shed

light upon the rhetorical activity of the antislavery movement during the war years raises several questions. First, did the aggressor rhetors of the antislavery movement abandon their efforts in 1861, when the Civil War began, in 1863, when Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, or in 1865, when the South capitulated? Second, did the aggressor rhetors of the movement view their cause as being either won or lost at the time of the start of the Civil War? Finally, how did these events affect the Southern defendant rhetors? Did they abandon their counter rhetorical efforts against the aggressor rhetors at the start or finish of the Civil War? Although it can be said with confidence that the members of the antislavery movement had realized their dream of freedom for the slaves by April of 1865, additional research into the rhetoric of the American Antislavery Movement during the war years is clearly in order.



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THE RHETORIC OF THE AMERICAN ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT  
AS APPLIED TO GRIFFIN'S THESIS OF HISTORICAL MOVEMENT

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this report, I apply research studies concerning the rhetoric of the American Antislavery Movement to Leland Griffin's thesis regarding the three periods of the rhetorical life of a historical movement. Through this process I hope to not only learn more about the rhetorical life of the American Antislavery Movement, but also to test Griffin's predictions concerning both the periods of inception, rhetorical crisis and consummation and the various aggressor and defendant rhetors and journalists of the American Antislavery Movement. This report is presented in chronological order, covering the rhetorical life of a historical movement as posited by Griffin; beginning with the period of inception, extending through the period of rhetorical crisis, and concluding with the period of consummation. The report concludes with criticisms of both the rhetorical scholarship so far conducted on the American Antislavery Movement and the viability of Griffin's model.