

Garrisonian Abolitionists and Woman's Rights Advocates

Incompatible Allies

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The 19th century was a period of reform for the United States in several different spheres of society. From child labor opponents to antislavery societies, advocates of reform flooded American newspapers and politics. Abolitionism, the greatest reform movement in the US at the time, brought on the development of several other human rights reforms. Woman's Suffrage was possibly the most closely related reform to the antislavery movement. Many of the arguments maintaining that slaves should enjoy the same rights as white males could also be applied to women. The Women's Movement was highly controversial as were most of the reform movements. However, the Women's Movement was so controversial that the most radical abolitionist group of the day, the Garrisonians, split over it. The Garrisonians were supporters of the major reformer, William Lloyd Garrison, who was the first to advocate for immediate emancipation of the slaves in the United States. Prior to Garrison, American abolitionists were primarily concerned with sending the slaves back to Africa rather than setting them free. The fact that abolitionists believed that removing the slaves to Africa was the best thing to do demonstrates how embodied the US was in racism at the time. Far ahead of his time with his enlightened ideas, Garrison was considered to be a radical in his day. Garrison published his fundamental ideas and opinions in his newspaper entitled *The Liberator*. Garrison supported the Women's Movement wholeheartedly, but not all of his followers approved of his encouragement of women's rights. Instead, the Anti-Slavery Society split over the issue. Nevertheless, Garrison continued to support Women's Suffrage publically. With Garrison backing them, women's rights advocates began to receive attention at a greater level than they had before. However, not all of the attention was positive. Since Garrison was one of the most radical reformers of his day, associating themselves with Garrison caused women's right advocates to seem equally radical, thereby losing legitimacy among the majority of the public. Meanwhile, the Garrisonians did not

benefit from supporting women's rights either. Woman's Suffrage was just as radical a reform as immediate abolitionism was. Victorian ideals were ingrained in American society during the antebellum period. The Victorian ideal included the notion of separate spheres for men and women. Woman's sphere was in the home working as a homemaker, while man's sphere was the public arena including politics, business, and war. Women's rights clashed with the ideal Victorian family, and therefore posed a problem for the American public. Garrison's support of women's rights made him unpopular not only with the general public but also with other abolitionists. Besides the breakup of the Anti-Slavery Society, the Garrisonians may have also lost Pennsylvania Hall, the newly erected building meant to house the growing congregation of abolitionists, because of women's rights. Many abolitionists or would-be abolitionists were turned off by Garrison's encouragement of Women's Suffrage. Although well-intended, Garrisonians and Woman's Rights activists did not benefit from one another's support but rather hindered each other's cause.

Garrison's support of Women's Suffrage is well-documented and defined, for he made no attempt to hide his opinion on the matter. Indeed, he published seven resolutions in his paper, *The Liberator*, stating that all human beings have the same rights regardless of race or sex. Those who tried to suppress women and deny them their rights were tyrannical, prideful, and foolish. He refuted the idea that giving women rights would reduce their concern for their role as wives and mothers, as the majority of Americans believed it would. Indeed, Garrison argued that denying women their natural rights was a tragedy to all of humankind, for this treatment made women dependent servants who had been robbed of the potential usefulness to all mankind of

which they were capable. If the most ignorant man was still allowed to vote, then why should not intelligent women who were capable of bettering society also vote?¹

Besides his “Resolutions” printed in *The Liberator*, Garrison made several speeches and wrote many letters on the topic of women’s rights which have been well preserved. Garrison accepted the invitation to attend the Women’s Rights Convention in 1853, where he made a riveting speech in favor of universal rights. He emphasized the fact that women’s rights coincided with the rights of African Americans and any other group discriminated against in all countries and societies. He dared anyone to refute his argument against the divine cause of universal rights and claimed that there was no one who could, because there was no valid argument to do so.² Garrison believed that women deserved no rights only if the right to vote was actually a privilege. He used the evolution of human suffrage to show that logic and reason had paved the way. It was now time for women to be liberated as well.³ Even at an elderly age, Garrison regretted to miss the American Woman Suffrage Association’s meeting. He sent his regards and made it very clear that he still stood wholeheartedly for Women’s Suffrage. He encouraged women to continue until they were given their natural rights, for Garrison believed that everyone was endowed with natural rights.⁴ Concerning universal rights, Garrison corrected those who labeled him as a “Woman’s-Rights man” and pronounced himself instead to be a “Human Rights Man.”⁵ Women had already won the argument in Garrison’s perspective because

¹ William Lloyd Garrison, “Women’s Rights,” *The Liberator* 23, Boston. 28 October 1853: 172.

² William Lloyd Garrison, “Speech in support of the Resolution.” In *Proceedings of the Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at the Broadway Tabernacle, in the City of New York, on Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 6th and 7th, 1853*. (New York, N.Y: Fowlers and Wells, 1853): 83.

³ William Lloyd Garrison, “The Nature of a Republican Form of Government, read before the NAWSA Convention, February 1898.” *History of Woman Suffrage, 4: 1883-1900*. (Rochester, NY: Privately Published, 1902): 305-306.

⁴ William Lloyd Garrison, “Letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Mr. Blackwell, November 18, 1871”. *History of Woman Suffrage, 2*. (Rochester, NY: Privately Published, 1881): 816.

⁵ William Lloyd Garrison, “William Lloyd Garrison at the Woman’s Rights Convention.” Speech. In *Proceedings of the Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at the Broadway Tabernacle, in the City of New York, on Tuesday and Wednesday, Sept. 6th and 7th, 1853*. (New York, N.Y: Fowlers and Wells, 1853): 22.

of the clauses in the Declaration of Independence. He was ever hopeful that someday the Declaration would “be reduced to practice in our land... that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed.”⁶ This view was not a popular one, and Garrison felt the effects of the injustice of the press and called for unbiased reporting of the arguments made for universal rights. Even the Northern newspapers had little good to say of Garrison and his followers.⁷ However, Garrison was not entirely alone in his beliefs; several influential female abolitionists agreed with him.

Two of these prominent female abolitionists and women’s rights activists with whom Garrison held personal relationships were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. He had great respect for Elizabeth Cady Stanton whom he asked to make a speech at the American Anti-Slavery Society’s anniversary gathering in 1860.⁸ Stanton shared Garrison’s uncompromising personality and actively sought to obtain equality for slaves and women. She travelled to England several times in order to gain more support for Woman’s Suffrage.⁹ Garrison also corresponded frequently with Lucretia Mott, a leading Quaker abolitionist in Philadelphia. It is evident by his letters to her that they were close.¹⁰ Mott agreed with Garrison that allowing women to have the same rights as men would not decrease the woman’s role as a homemaker. Mott argued that the “sphere” in which man had placed woman was not her natural sphere of

⁶ William Lloyd Garrison, “Letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Susan B Anthony, July 16, 1878.” *History of Woman Suffrage*, 3. (Rochester, NY: Privately Published, 1886): 122-3.

⁷ William Lloyd Garrison, *At the Woman’s Rights Convention*, 22.

⁸ William Lloyd Garrison, “Letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mar.23, 1860.” *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences*, 2. (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922): 78.

⁹ Sandra Stanley Holton, “‘To Educate Women into Rebellion’: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists.” *American Historical Review* 99, (1994): 1112-1114, 1135.

¹⁰ William Lloyd Garrison, “Letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Lucretia Mott, April 8, 1867.” *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters*. (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1884): 139-142.

influence.¹¹ Rather, men were oppressing women by limiting their activity. At the time, the home was considered to be woman's place; she was a homemaker and nothing more. By arguing that this small sphere did not incorporate women's full capabilities, Mott endeavored to prove that women's rights activists did not ask any favors, nor were they attempting to overthrow society. Instead, women only demanded their natural human rights.¹² Eventually, Stanton and Mott would become indispensable to the Woman's Suffrage movement due to their initiation of the first woman's rights convention.

Besides Stanton and Mott, two other female abolitionists associated with William Lloyd Garrison were Sarah and Angelina Grimke. The Grimke sisters were the daughters of a prominent slave holder in South Carolina. The sisters eventually grew to loathe the institution of slavery and left their family behind to move to the North. Passionate for the abolitionist cause, they began travelling about New England speaking out against slavery.¹³ The sisters shared Garrison's view of universal rights. They believed that Perfectionism (equality among all humankind) should be the ultimate goal of reformers.¹⁴ When the Grimke sisters reached out to Garrison to help them find their platform, Garrison immediately received them and allowed them to speak at anti-slavery meetings.¹⁵ Garrison thought so highly of the sisters that he even published a letter in his newspaper concerning the abolition of slavery which was addressed to him from Angelina Grimke. Angelina wrote concerning the violence that abolitionists often faced. Violence against the abolitionists broke out frequently. Indeed, a mob of anti-slavery

¹¹ Lucretia Mott, "Speech of Lucretia Mott, Philadelphia, 1849." *History of Woman Suffrage, 1: 1848-1861*. (New York, NY: Fowlers and Wells, 1881): 368-69.

¹² Lucretia Mott, "Letter of Lucretia Mott, April 13, 1850." *History of Woman Suffrage, 1: 1848-1861*. (New York, NY: Fowlers and Wells, 1881): 812-13.

¹³ William Loren Katz, "The Black/White Fight Against Slavery and for Women's Rights in America." *Freedomways* 16 (1976): 234.

¹⁴ Dorothy C. Bass, *'The Best Hopes of the Sexes': The Woman Question in Garrisonian Abolitionism*. (Providence, RI: Brown University, 1981): 161-2.

¹⁵ Fanny Garrison Villard, "Garrison and Woman's Suffrage," *The Crisis* 4 (1912): 240-42.

opponents dragged Garrison himself through the streets of Boston. When Garrison called for tolerance from the public concerning free speech and declared that he would continue to report the truth concerning slavery publically, Angelina Grimke wrote a letter of encouragement to Garrison stating that those who stood for the truth would always be persecuted. Persecution was a good sign however – a sign that people were paying attention to the truth, and they did not want to hear it. Angelina believed that violence was a necessary evil to change. Though unfortunate, violence was a sign that the abolitionists were on the radar of the public.¹⁶

Indeed there was violence. Even in the Northern state of Connecticut, racism prevailed. There, a schoolteacher by the name of Prudence Crandall taught an all-girls school – white girls. When Crandall decided to admit a black girl into her school, she was met with serious opposition from the townsfolk. Parents withdrew their daughters from school in order to force Crandall to deny the colored girl admission. Rather than bending to their will, Crandall decided to convert her school into a school for black girls. Enraged, the majority of the town's residents organized protests and some pressed lawsuits against her. Ultimately, in 1834, vandals succeeded in severely damaging Crandall's school so that she was forced to abandon it.¹⁷ The fact that this violence occurred in a Northern state speaks volumes about the mentality of the time. Racism was embedded in society, and the public was intensely skeptical of anything that might disrupt the normal state of affairs.

¹⁶ Stephen H. Browne, "Encountering Angelina Grimke: Violence, Identity, and the Creation of Radical Community." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82 (1996): 57-60; Marsha Foletta, "Angelina Grimké: Asceticism, Millenarianism, and Reform." *The New England Quarterly* 80, (June 2007): 197; Catherine H. Birney, *Sarah and Angeline Grimke: The First American Women Advocates of Abolition and Woman's Rights*, (New York, NY: Dillingham, 1885): 120-131.

¹⁷ Lawrence J. Friedman, "Racism and Sexism in Ante-bellum America: The Prudence Crandall Episode Reconsidered." *Societas* 4 (June 1974): 211.

Society's idea of a normal state of affairs was grounded in Victorian ideals – the ideal of separate spheres. Women were to remain at home. Their duties were to bear and raise children and keep the house in order. They did not belong in the public arena, for they were too pure to be corrupted by such a cruel world. Men, on the other hand, were strong. They ruled their households. The public arena was man's domain. Politics were man's sphere. The family was based on these ideals, and society depended on the family. Therefore it was paramount that these values remain consistent to retain an orderly society. Besides these notions, immediate emancipation was still a radical view in abolitionism.¹⁸ Freeing all the Blacks at once would be just as catastrophic to society as the destruction of the separate spheres. Those who disrupted the ideal system with which the general public was comfortable would be the subject of scrutiny and criticism.

The Grimke sisters were among the first to feel the full weight of public skepticism. Initially, they had not been women's rights activists but merely female abolitionists.¹⁹ Because it was unthinkable for women to speak publically before men at the time, the sisters labeled their events "for women only" in hopes to prevent public criticism, but it was not long before men began to attend their speeches as well.²⁰ The public, clergymen, and even fellow abolitionists harshly rebuked the sisters for speaking out against slavery in the presence of men. It was scandalous for women to be so forward at the time. The Grimke sisters had a heart for abolition and it was not until they began to be vocal that they realized that women were in a very similar position as the slaves. In response to public outrage, the sisters attempted to defend their right to

¹⁸ Dorothy C. Bass, *The Best Hopes of the Sexes*, 4, 16; Stanley Harrold, *American Abolitionists*. (London, England: Routledge, 2001): 41.

¹⁹ Susan Schultz Huxman, "Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, and Angelina Grimke: Symbolic Convergence and a Nascent Rhetorical Vision." *Communication Quarterly* 44. (Winter 1996): 16.

²⁰ William Loren Katz, "The Black/White Fight," 234.

speak in public. This approach was not well received, however. Several abolitionists attacked the Grimkes for defending their right to speak in public.²¹ The notion of separate spheres ran deep.

It was Garrison's disregard for the idea of separate spheres which ultimately divided the abolitionist group in two. His daughter later wrote that several of Garrison's supporters abandoned him once he began to allow women to speak at anti-slavery gatherings.²² But Garrison was a man unafraid to speak the truth. He preached what he believed. He did not attempt to calculate what kind of effects his beliefs would have on his career as an abolitionist. He did not choose which of his opinions to release or not release. He simply said what he believed needed to be said to proclaim the truth to others, and he went on preaching universal human rights. Garrison was not in the business to make friends. He ultimately lost legitimacy among abolitionists for his beliefs, and the Anti-Slavery Society split. Garrison was left with some loyal followers who also advocated women's rights. Ironically, women's activists lost legitimacy because of their association with Garrison.

Loss of legitimacy among the public is best depicted in the blatant destruction of Pennsylvania Hall. Needing a place to congregate so that they could speak freely with one another concerning the abolition of slavery, antislavery societies raised funds to build their own hall where they could meet without interruption. However, the result did not turn out as they originally planned. Pennsylvania Hall survived four days after completion before it was burned to the ground by an angry mob. During those brief four days, several abolitionists made speeches concerning slavery, including William Lloyd Garrison and women such as Lucretia Mott and Angelina Grimke. While members of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women made

²¹ Dorothy Bass, *The Best Hopes of the Sexes*, 160-2.

²² Fanny Garrison Villiard, "Garrison and Woman's Suffrage," 240-2.

their speeches, an angry crowd began to congregate outside of Pennsylvania Hall. The police did nothing to stop the mob. Although the abolitionists called upon the mayor for help to break up the mob, the mayor returned home after a minimal effort to calm the crowd by reasoning with them. Once the fire started, firemen did not attempt to save the hall, but rather soaked the buildings surrounding it in order to keep them safe. The city officials allowed for the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall.²³

The destruction of Pennsylvania Hall demonstrates the public's feeling toward the activists they deemed as radicals. Likely, it is not a coincidence that the angry mob gathered outside the building when female speakers occupied the podium. The majority of the public strongly felt that it was promiscuous for women to speak in front of men. This kind of behavior offended the public. By allowing women to speak at the meeting, Garrison very well might have provoked the burning of the hall. There was a great deal of speculation on whether the hall could have been saved by the mayor and the firemen. Of course, the hall might have been saved if the firemen had attempted to save it, but this example shows just how important traditional roles were to Americans at that time. The firemen may have been afraid of the mob and therefore did not attempt to save the hall, but it is likely that they felt the same way that the public did. There was no tolerance for outspoken women. The destruction of the hall meant the loss of thousands of dollars for the abolitionists. To say the least, it was a high price to pay for the sake of women's rights. It would not be the last time that Garrison had to deal with opposition concerning women's rights.

During the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in Britain in 1840, Garrison's loyalty to women's rights was tested yet again by fellow abolitionists. This time, however, Garrison

²³ Ira B. Brown, "Racism and Sexism: The Case of Pennsylvania Hall." *Phylon* 37 (1976): 126-136.

remained silent. As vocal as Garrison was, this particular instance of silence is worthy of attention. The World Anti-Slavery Convention did not permit female members to participate in the proceedings. A heated debate ensued between a few women's-rights men and the other abolitionists at the convention over the "Woman Question." However, Garrison made his point clearest by silence. Enraged that the convention did not permit female members, he did not attempt to persuade them otherwise but rather refused to participate in the convention altogether. Declining a seat, Garrison stood and watched the convention underway, but made no speech. His demonstration held more weight than the previous arguments made by the women's-rights men. The atmosphere at the convention was tense due to Garrison's silence.²⁴ Unlike the other men, Garrison had not spoken for women. Speaking on their behalf would only reinforce the same ideals that had been in place for centuries. In fact, because other Garrisonians spoke out for the excluded women, Lucretia Mott admitted in a letter that she "shrunk from a defense of [women's] rights," for others had "gone forward and stood in the breach."²⁵ Perhaps Garrison's demonstration was more powerful and effective than all of Garrison's writings or speeches on women's rights ever were, for his silence not only drew attention, but also encouraged women to speak for themselves.

The exclusion of women at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 led Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the decision that they must organize a women's rights convention on their own. It is probable that these two women had more influence on the ultimate success of the Women's Suffrage Movement than Garrison and his followers did. Stanton confided her great disappointment at the World Anti-Slavery Convention to Mott which

²⁴ Lisa Shawn Hogan, "A Time for Silence: William Lloyd Garrison and the 'Woman Question' at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention." *Gender Issues* 25 (2008): 75.

²⁵ Lucretia Mott, "Lucretia Mott to Maria Weston Chapman, 29 July 1840." *How Did Lucretia Mott Combine Her Commitments to Antislavery and Women's Rights, 1840-1860?* Boston: Public Library.

motivated them to do something about their shared frustration.²⁶ Although several men like Garrison publically supported women's rights, it was the women themselves who initiated the first convention for their cause at Seneca Falls. Mott and Stanton eventually organized the Seneca Falls meeting where they and other women declared that men and women are created equal. The meeting was a huge success for the women, for a mixed crowd of almost three hundred people attended. Fredrick Douglass, a prominent black abolitionist, also attended and greatly supported the women in their endeavors. His support was significant during the conference as it was he who convinced others to agree that women should indeed have the right to vote. This resolution passed at the convention because of Douglass' support.²⁷ Stanton later expressed her satisfaction in a letter to Mott, stating that the publicity the first Women's Rights Convention received from newspapers such as the *Herald* would soon reap concern for woman's plight from others.²⁸ The success of the convention was a significant milestone in the history of Woman's Suffrage. It was an incredible feat for women to bring about a successful convention passing all of their resolutions, because the notion of women's rights was extremely radical.

If there is one subject that historians can agree on concerning abolitionists and women's rights activists, it is the radicalism of both groups for their day. In her work, "Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860," Kristin Hoganson describes the great difficulty the Garrisonians faced as the radical group of their day. Garrison's view that women also deserved the same rights that white men enjoyed greatly concerned not only the slaveholders in the South but also a significant number of citizens in the North. Even several abolitionists

²⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The First Woman's Rights Convention," *Elizabeth Cady Stanton As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences*, 1. (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922): 141-50.

²⁷ Stanley Harrold, *American Abolitionists*, 49.

²⁸ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Letter from Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Lucretia Mott, September 30, 1838." *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary and Reminiscences* 2 (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922): 20-22.

could not come to terms with the idea. Many people believed that giving women rights would effectively turn society upside down. If women were allowed to join in the political sphere, then there would follow a collapse in the ideal Victorian family, which American society so revered at that period in time. Men would no longer be head of their households, and women would become corrupt and therefore unqualified to teach their children good morals. These arguments made it difficult for the Garrisonians to find a podium among the public.²⁹ Historian Dorothy Bass agrees concerning the significance of the proper family in the antebellum era, stating that it was the very foundation of society. The point cannot be emphasized enough. In modern times it is nearly impossible to imagine the weight of its importance in the antebellum society. Bass estimates that just a couple hundred men and women agreed with Garrison's view concerning women's roles in society. Bass does not specify whether those people were all Americans or if they included people from other countries as well. Either way, this number is only a tiny fraction of the population.³⁰ It is important to understand just how radical and socially unacceptable the ideals of the abolitionists and women's activists were. Historian Stanley Harrold concurs that abolitionism "challenged the racial, political, moral, and social status quo." For Garrison to call for immediate emancipation of the slaves was almost unthinkable at the time. Much of the public was not prepared to tolerate even gradual emancipation. The ideal that men were suited for politics and women for rearing children was simply the norm in antebellum society. Men were brave and intelligent and were therefore needed in the realms of business and politics.³¹ These realms were no place for a lady. Women were too soft and too pure for an ugly business like

²⁹ Kristin Hoganson, "Garrisonian Abolitionists and the Rhetoric of Gender, 1850-1860." *American Quarterly* 45 (Dec 1993): 558.

³⁰ Dorothy C. Bass, *The Best Hopes of the Sexes*, 4, 16.

³¹ Stanley Harrold, *American Abolitionists*, 41-49.

politics. If women left the home to join the political sphere, men would essentially be stripped of their manhood.

Historians have written books and articles discussing the “Woman Question” in Garrisonian abolition, but few have considered how Garrisonian abolitionists affected Women’s Suffrage, if they had any influence at all. Historian Stanley Harrold acknowledges that it was Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott who organized the first Women’s Rights Convention. During this convention at Seneca Falls, Elizabeth Cady Stanton proposed a resolution demanding the right of women to vote. Harrold also notes that Garrisonians had little to do with passing this resolution. According to the Garrisonians, the US Constitution was a proslavery document. Because they refused to vote in a country with a corrupt government built on a proslavery Constitution, it was problematic for the Garrisonians to aid in passing the resolution. The resolution did pass, however, after a convincing speech made by Fredrick Douglass, who did not share Garrison’s view that the Constitution was proslavery.³² Historian William Katz agrees with Harrold and makes a clear argument that women were the primary reason for the advancement of Woman’s Rights. Katz states that abolitionism was merely the window through which women began to take up the human’s rights cause. Antislavery gave women such as the Grimke sisters a reason to voice their opinions in the public arena. This opportunity led women to understand their own plight and fight for their own cause.³³ Furthermore, there remains Lisa Hogan’s argument stating that Garrison’s silence during the World Anti-Slavery Convention after women were denied participation from the event was in fact the most effective approach at gaining the attention of others and giving women the chance to speak for themselves. Hogan’s argument that

³² Stanley Harrold, *American Abolitionists*, 49; Tyrone Tillery, “The Inevitability of the Douglass-Garrison Conflict” *Phylon* 37 (1976): 143-4.

³³ William Loren Katz, “The Black/White Fight,” 235-6.

Garrison's silence was the best means to obtain the attention of others strongly suggests that women might have been better off without the Garrisonians' support. Kristin Hoganson's assertion that Garrison and his followers constantly struggled as the radical group of the day further suggests that they may not have been the ideal group for women's rights advocates to associate.³⁴ Although these historians do not specifically discuss whether or not Garrison and his followers helped or hindered the Woman's Rights cause, they do indicate that women were the primary promoters of their cause. Ultimately, women made their own decisions and spoke for themselves. These arguments substantiate the claim that Garrison's support of Women's Rights was purely moral support.

As for whether women's rights advocates advanced the Garrisonians' cause, historian Dorothy Bass discusses the idea of Perfectionism and why it led to the split of the Anti-Slavery Society. Bass asserts that both women's rights advocates such as the Grimke sisters and the Garrisonians supported human rights (Perfectionism). In other words, they believed that everyone was equal regardless of race or sex and should therefore all enjoy the same rights. Other abolitionists did not share this view. In fact, some abolitionists criticized the Grimke sisters for defending their right to speak out against slavery in public.³⁵ They did not want any hint of women's rights spoken of in the Grimke sisters' lectures, and if the sisters defended their right to speak, it was no longer just about abolitionism but also women's rights. The Garrisonians disagreed and supported the cause of Perfectionism. It was for this reason that the Anti-Slavery Society split. Therefore it is safe to assert that women's rights advocates did not advance the abolitionists cause in any way. Instead of making the Anti-Slavery Society stronger

³⁴ Kristin Hoganson, "Garrisonian Abolitionists," 558.

³⁵ Dorothy Bass, *The Best Hopes of the Sexes*, 160-2.

by their involvement, women unintentionally caused an irreconcilable issue among the abolitionists.

Although Garrison supported the Women's Movement, and several women's rights activists were involved in abolitionism, the two did not assist each other's cause in any significant manner. Garrison gave women a platform to speak from, but this only drew negative attention to both parties involved. If it were possible for Garrison to appear more radical than he was already considered to be, allowing female members into the Anti-Slavery Society ensured it. Abolitionists who had once supported Garrison turned their backs on him when he began to throw their ideal of social norms concerning women to the wind. Meanwhile, women struggled to find an ear that would listen to their pleas because of their association with Garrison. It did not help women's cause either when some abolitionists spoke on behalf of women at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. The burning of Pennsylvania Hall resulted in a great loss for both Garrisonians and women's rights activists, for it not only stripped them of their newly built refuge, but it also proved that the public refused to listen to women's pleas. The public was already frustrated with the Garrisonians, but female speakers propelled them over the edge.

In conclusion, the abolitionist movement and Women's Rights Movement hindered one another rather than advancing one another. Although Garrison wholeheartedly supported women's rights, he was such a radical abolitionist that his support did little but cause women's rights activists to lose whatever legitimacy they may have had with the public. Garrison certainly drew attention to the Women's Movement, but much of that attention was negative. Likewise the Women's Rights Movement did nothing to benefit the Garrisonians in the abolitionist cause. In fact, Garrison hurt his own abolitionist society by publically supporting the Women's Movement. His support of women caused him to lose the support of many men. Not only did the

abolitionists split over the “Woman Question,” but Pennsylvania Hall was burned to the ground because an angry mob was offended by female speakers. Supporting women only made Garrison appear more radical to a public that was still caught up in racism and Victorian ideals. In this period of time, American society was simply not prepared for the radical changes that Garrison and Woman Suffragists were promoting. The reformers were far ahead of their time in their beliefs. Although Garrison and prominent women’s rights advocates agreed on universal suffrage and natural human rights, the public made it impossible for them to benefit from one another’s support. The ultimate success of the Women’s Suffrage Movement was due to the efforts and determination of women themselves rather than to anyone else. Although Garrison might have given women a platform and drawn attention to them in newspaper articles and speeches, it was ultimately women who decided how to use their voices to alter the public’s mind concerning Women’s Suffrage. In the end, after years of toiling for their cause, both Garrisonians and Woman’s Rights advocates achieved their goals, but this accomplishment was not on account of each other.

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