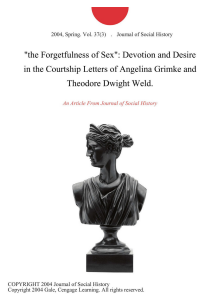


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READ PDF FORMAT EVROMEDIA THE FORGETFULNESS OF SEX DEVOTION AND DESIRE IN THE COURTSHIP LETTERS OF ANGELINA GRIMKE AND THEODORE DWIGHT WELD INSTANTLY MOBI



Author: Journal of Social History

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In 1837, Angelina and Sarah Grimke, daughters of a South Carolina planter turned abolitionist orators, each penned a series of public letters in which they attacked the rigid distinctions that their culture drew between the masculine and the feminine. In Angelina's "Letters to Catherine Beecher" and Sarah's "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes," each sister argued that contemporary sex roles that characterized white men as political and economic actors in the public sphere while relegating white women to the private sphere of the home amounted to a perversion of God's plan. According to Angelina, notions of manhood gave men "a charter for the exercise of tyranny and selfishness, pride and arrogance, lust and brutal violence." Worse yet, ideals of womanhood "robbed woman of essential rights, the right to think and speak and act on all great moral questions [and] the right to fulfil the great end of her being, as a moral, intellectual and immortal creature." Sarah expressed the same idea: "instead of regarding each other only in the light of immortal creatures," she wrote in the fourth letter of her series, "the mind is fettered by the idea which is early and industriously infused into it, that we must never forget the distinctions between male and female." The sisters called upon their readers to take up the heroic task of forgetting sex, defying the gender imperatives of the culture and instead obeying a higher law by viewing both men and women as spiritual rather than sexed beings. "When human beings are regarded as moral beings," Angelina asserted, "sex, instead of being enthroned upon the summit, administering upon rights and responsibilities, sinks into insignificance and nothingness." In Sarah's words, only when "our intercourse is purified by the forgetfulness of sex" would men and women recognize and fulfill their true roles in the designs of providence. (1) The Grimkes composed these two series of letters in the middle of a lecturing tour of New England. In the summer of 1837 the sisters began what was to become a yearlong tour, traveling from town to town advocating the abolitionist cause before thousands who came to hear them speak. Women's engagement in this kind of public activism was unprecedented, and the sisters' culturally conservative contemporaries reacted to it with a mixture of disdain and alarm. In a Pastoral Letter issued by the General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts (which Sarah responded to in her later letters) and Catherine Beecher's *Essay on Slavery and Abolition, With Reference to the Duty of American Females* (which prompted Angelina's series), the Congregationalist clergy and Beecher (herself a daughter of a famed Congregationalist minister, Lyman Beecher) each claimed that a rigid, social hierarchy that placed men above women was part of the divine order. (2) In their responses to these attacks, as many historians have explored, the Grimkes forcefully asserted women's right and sacred duty to exercise a political voice, to transgress the boundaries of woman's sphere and publicly advocate causes that they believe were morally right. (3)

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