

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

CHARLOTTE FORTEN GRIMKÉ

poet, anti-slavery activist, educator

“At times I feel it almost impossible not to be despond entirely of there ever being a better, brighter day for us. None but those who experience it can know what it is- this constant galling sense of cruel injustice and wrong.”



PUBLIC DOMAIN IMAGE

Background Information

Born: August 17, 1837; Died: July 23, 1914

Grimké was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was born into a prominent free Black family, many members of whom were active in the abolitionist movement. Philadelphia's segregated school system resulted in Grimké being privately tutored before attending a secondary school in Salem, Massachusetts. There, Grimké was the only African American to attend Higginson Grammar School. Grimké later went on to attend Salem Normal School, a teacher-training school, where she graduated in 1856. She then went on to teach at Epes Grammar School, which is also where she discovered her passion for poetry writing.¹

Grimké's Resistance

Grimké's activism work began when she joined the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society (SFASS). This society financially supported abolitionist publications, such as *The Liberator*, as well as participating in other reform activities.² Grimké was an influential activist and leader in civil rights.³ During her career, Grimké was involved in SFASS fund-raising as well as coalition building.

In 1892, Grimké was among the women who formed the Colored Women's League in Washington, D.C. The Colored Women's League was a service-oriented club, with goals to promote unity, social progress, and the best interests of the African American community.³

In 1896, Grimké became one of the co-founders of the National Association of Colored Women. She used her skills to publicly speak on issues this association was trying to address. Grimké also coordinated lectures by prominent speakers and writers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson.⁴

Achievements

Grimké wrote poetry and essays throughout her life. These writings were published as *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké* in one volume in 1988. Today, her essays and poetry are still read, as they “offer a unique perspective on the period of transition after the end of slavery in America.”¹

Essential Questions

1. How did Grimké use her privilege as a free and educated woman to advocate for change?
 - a. Why was her perspective important?

2. Think about the social media platforms that you have access to.
 - a. When was the first time you saw activist movements on social media?
 - b. How can you use your voice on those platforms to advocate for change?

3. ***“At times I feel it almost impossible not to despond entirely of there ever being a better, brighter day for us. None but those who experience it can know what it is- this constant galling sense of cruel injustice and wrong.”***
 - a. Can this quote be applied to 21st century society?
 - i. If so, how?
 - b. How can activists and advocates create a sense of optimism while working for a better world?

¹Wallach, J. (2020, August 18). Charlotte Forten Grimké. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charlotte-Forten-Grimke>

²Yee, S. (2009, October 16) *Female Anti-Slavery Society, Salem, Massachusetts (1832-1866)*. Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/female-anti-slavery-society-salem-massachusetts-1832-1866/>

³Smith, Jessie Carney (1992). "Josephine Beall Bruce". *Notable Black American women* (v1 ed.). Gale Research Inc. p. 123. OCLC 34106990.

⁴"Charlotte Forten Grimké (U.S. National Park Service)". Retrieved November 23, 2020, from <https://www.nps.gov/people/charlotte-forten-grimke.htm>