

DAVID SEDARIS

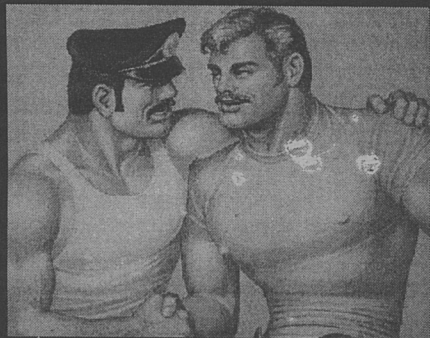
FLYNN CENTER

WEDNESDAY APRIL 2 2003 | 7:30 PM

WE'VE GOT TICKETS!

MPM has a limited number of balcony tickets available for best-selling author and NPR humorist David Sedaris' performance at the Flynn Center in Burlington, VT on Wednesday, April 2, 2003 @ 7:30 p.m. Join us for an entertaining evening of theater!

Tickets are just \$25, a portion of which goes to benefit Mountain Pride Media and Out In The Mountains. To purchase tickets contact Roland Palmer at 802-383-7679 or by email: rfpvt@together.net



WALK IN ORAL HIV TESTING FREE, ANONYMOUS, NO NEEDLES

27 SOUTH MAIN ST.
RUTLAND
802-775-5884
WEDNESDAYS
4PM-7PM

361 PEARL ST.
BURLINGTON
802-863-2437
MONDAYS 4PM-7PM

1235 HOSPITAL DR.,
SUITE 3
ST. JOHNSBURY
802-748-9061
THURSDAYS 3:30-
6:30PM

39 BARRE ST. SUITE I
MONTPELIER
802-229-4560
TUESDAY FEB 24TH
1PM-4PM



Women Like That: The First of a Coming Black Genius

For many February is the season of paper hearts and red, red roses. It is also Black History Month and as good a time as any to consider the contributions of Angelina Weld Grimké, an African-American poet and writer of the early 20th century.

Angelina was born in Boston in 1880 to Archibald Grimké, an African-American lawyer and vice-president of the NAACP, and Sarah Stanley, a white woman from a prominent Boston family. When Angelina was three, her mother packed her up and left her husband. Four years later Angelina was sent back to live with her father and never saw her mother again. The reasons are not clearly recorded, though they may have involved racism. Sarah's family disapproved of the inter-racial marriage and may have pressured her to leave it. There is also evidence that Sarah was "confined" for some mental or physical illness. Mother and daughter wrote back and forth, however, Sarah hoping desperately to be reunited with her daughter.

Angelina was very attached to her father and credited him for making her the woman she was, which may mean a woman who did not indulge in affairs with other women. She had begun exchanging love letters with other girls as early as age thirteen. In 1896, when she was sixteen, she answered a letter from her friend Mamie Burrill who had written, "Angie, do you love me as you used to?"

"Oh, Mamie, if you only know how my heart beats when I think of you and it yearns and pants to gaze ... upon your lovely face ... I hope, darling, that in a few years you will come to me and be my love, my wife!"

Her father must not have approved of this sort of behavior for later, in 1903, she wrote in a diary, "My father and I have been having a hard time tonight over you, dear. I guess he is right and I shall try to give you up."

Angelina attended what is now Wellesley College and graduated with a degree in physical education in 1902. She went to Washington, DC and taught high school gym for several years before taking a job at another high school teaching English.

While her poetry is concerned with emotions and matters of the heart, her other works of fiction and drama are focused on racial injustice: on the collective anger and grief of African-Americans over the lynchings in the South at this time and the failure of Northern whites to respond. Some of the descriptions in her short stories are extremely graphic.



In 1916 her play, *Rachel*, was produced in DC by the NAACP. It was written and produced as a response to the popular racist film, *Birth of a Nation*. The protagonist, a young woman named Rachel, reacts to the violence against African-Americans by deciding to neither marry nor bear children so that she does not provide whites with more victims.

Angelina also published two stories in the *Birth Control Review* on this theme with the idea the African-American women should be encouraged not to have children. (The birth control movement has deep roots in racism and classism, but that is

another story.)

While this approach would result in self-genocide, it may also be read as a convenient mask for her homosexuality. Her father had very definite ideas of how a middle class African-American woman should behave and Angelina strove hard to please him.

After the diary of 1903 there is no evidence of other lovers. But, who knows? Her poems are poetry from the heart, most of them around themes of love and loss, and about other women.

I clasp thee close within my yearning arms / I kiss thine eyes, thy lips, thy silky hair, / I felt thy soft arms twining round my neck, / Thy bashful, maiden, kisses on

my cheek / ... And then the vision faded and was gone / And I was in my lonely darkened room, / ... Believing not that thou wert dead.

Not everything Angelina wrote was dark and depressing:

*Molly raised shy eyes to me,
On an April day;
Close we stood beneath a tree,
Molly raised shy eyes to me,
Shining sweet and wistfully,
Wet and yet quite gay;
Molly raised shy eyes to me,
On an April Day*

Most of Angelina Grimké's writing was produced between 1900 and 1920, barely pre-dating the Harlem Renaissance, which she saw coming. "In preparation of the coming black genius," she wrote, "I believe there must be among us a stronger ... feeling of race consciousness, race solidarity, race pride ... Then perhaps, some day, somewhere black youth, will come forth, see us clearly, intelli-

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gently, sympathetically, and will write about us and then come into his own."

Angelina Weld Grimké was the first of this black genius. ▼

Further Reading:

▼ *The Selected Works of Angelina Weld Grimké*, ed. Carolivia Herron, Oxford University Press, 1991

▼ *The Black Renaissance in Washington, DC*, www.dclibrary.org/blkren

▼ *Chloe Plus Olivia*, edited by Lillian Faderman, Viking, 1994.

Francesca Susanna is a writer interested in lesbians through history. She lives in Burlington.