

ANGELINA WELD GRIMKÉ

POET AND PLAYWRIGHT

b. February 27, 1880, Boston, Massachusetts

d. June 10, 1958, New York, New York

*“I oft have dreamed the bliss
Of the nectar in one kiss.”*

**Grimké’s three-act
drama, “Rachel,” was
the first play by a black
woman to be staged in
a public theater.**

Angelina Weld Grimké was a poet, teacher and playwright who helped pave the way for the Harlem Renaissance. Grimké was one of the nation’s first celebrated female African-American authors.

Grimké was born to a prominent biracial couple who divorced soon after her birth. Her mother left when Grimké was a toddler and committed suicide several years later. Grimké had a strained relationship with her father, whose lineage of notable abolitionists set high expectations for his daughter.

Grimké excelled academically, publishing her first poem at age 13. She earned a degree in physical education from the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics. She moved to Washington, D.C., where she taught while writing poetry in her spare time.

Although Grimké was called to write, she felt pressure to please her father by not publishing anything that could tarnish the family name. What Grimké did publish was highly successful, including her three-act drama, “Rachel,” the first play by a black woman to be staged in a public theater.

Little is known of Grimké’s personal relationships, but her work often alludes to suppressed emotions, and several of her unpublished poems feature explicitly lesbian content. Her diary includes entries about her female lovers.

Although her work was well received, Grimké retreated to solitude for most of her life. After her father’s death in 1930, she never published again.



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