You Are What You Eat:  
The Grimké-Weld Family and the Graham Diet

by

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Oh! Who Would be a Grahamite?

What have I done—what crime have I committed?
Why should I be so roughly—rudely treated?
I respect all—male and female—black and white
But oh! The horrid thing! *She is a Grahamite*

The rich, the poor, in silks or rags are all to me
Dear brothers—sisters, equals, one family,
I wish them peace by day—balmy sleep by night;
But oh! The vulgar thing! She is a Grahamite!

Dear Friends & neighbors, speak out, what can I do
That I may not seem so monster-like to you?
’Tis not pleasant to be stared at when in sight
But if you please, I’ll even be a simple Grahamite

Those old friends who seemed most true, now from me run
And even parents, too, their own dear daughter shun
But do not blame them—they think they’re doing right,
For oh! The cruel thing! She is a Grahamite!

Let me nurse the sick—the poor—but do not ask
Me to perform the murderous task
Of feasting upon blood; with my present light,
I would much rather be a loathsome Grahamite

While bloody feasts inflame the blood, good pure fruits
Would make it clean, and thus raise us above the brutes
Then do your best—your worst—my character to blight,
I must be still a pure, a simple Grahamite

Now, dear parents, neighbors, friends, I wish you well,
I freely bid you all a kind—a warm farewell—
I wish you *long life* and *health* and therefore, *light*
To see ‘tis good to be a simple Grahamite

M.B. Randall                  Woodstock, June the 12th
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**Introduction**

**Graham Bread and the Grahamite Waffle:**  
**From Sylvester Graham to Sylvester’s Restaurant**

In Northampton, Massachusetts, there is a restaurant called Sylvester’s. Opened in 1983, the restaurant is known for its homemade bread and locally sourced ingredients. Whenever my family and I found ourselves traveling through Massachusetts, we often made a point to stop there. I always ordered French toast and a mug of hot chocolate covered in whipped cream. My family stopped going to Sylvester’s when I was twelve, I always had fond memories of that giant mug of steaming chocolate, topped with a three-inch mound of sweet whipped cream.

It was not until I embarked upon this project that I made the connection—that Sylvester’s Restaurant, located in a red brick building at 111 Pleasant Street—was once the home of the dietitian Sylvester Graham. Prospective thesis writers are sometimes told that they don’t find their topic, but their topic finds them—evidently, my topic first found me when I was eight years old.

The food at Sylvester’s certainly would not pass for true Grahamite fare. The “Grahamite Waffle” is topped with fruit, graham cracker streusel, and a choice of whipped cream or vanilla yogurt. The “Sylvester’s Special” burger is topped with cheese and bacon. When I visited in March 2018, I had the “Reuben Benedict Special,” which was delicious, albeit ahistorical.

An ahistorical version of Sylvester Graham’s legacy is preserved at this restaurant, just as distant from reality as the occasional sensationalist article,
such as The New York Post’s “The graham cracker was invented to stop you from masturbating,” The Atlantic’s “Looking to Quell Sexual Urges? Consider the Graham Cracker,” or Buzzfeed’s “I Just Found Out Why Graham Crackers and Corn Flakes Were Invented and My Sex Life Will Never Be the Same,” an equally ahistorical version of Sylvester Graham’s legacy is preserved here.¹ It lives in the “Sylvester’s Blend” coffee served in the restaurant, in their pillowy soft whole wheat toast, and in the locally sourced milk and eggs.

Sylvester Graham’s diet is the “foundation” for the cuisine served at Sylvester’s. Yet, it is nowhere close to the real diet, as it was practiced in the nineteenth century. This raises significant guiding questions for the thesis—what is a diet? What does it mean to practice a diet? An examination of the Graham diet, as well as the practices of some of its adherents, will help illuminate the answers.

The Graham Diet, popular in the 1830s and 40s, was a diet of omission. Meat, dairy products, spices, condiments, coffee, alcohol, and tea were all forbidden. Instead, Graham recommended whole grain brown bread, and fresh fruits and vegetables, simply prepared. This diet was derived from Graham’s overall theory of health; literally everything, from your food, to your clothes, to your hygiene, to the construction of your house, to even your

¹ Natalie O’Neill, “The graham cracker was invented to stop you from masturbating.” Living, New York Post, September 13, 2016, https://nypost.com/2016/09/13/the-graham-cracker-was-invented-to-stop-you-from-masturbating/
thoughts and sexual practices, contributed to your health. Graham defined “health” as the possession of calm, even nerves. Disease and impaired function were indicators of overstimulated nerves.

This joint History and Environmental Studies thesis will explore the dietary theories of Sylvester Graham and how they were practiced by the Grimké-Welds, a family of abolitionists. Today, diet implies a specific regimen calibrated to maintain health, which typically involves calorie counting, nutrient quantifying, and meal balancing. Health is defined as an absence of disease. But in Graham’s time, diet and health were viewed more holistically. To Graham and his adherents, a diet was connected to the idea of living a good life, which implied spirituality, morality, and especially, a social conscience. The desire to eat was driven by more than merely taste or possible health benefits. The moral and political implications were just as important. Thus, through his dietary theories, Graham visualized a means to the ideal civilization. For this reason, abolitionists and radicals like the Grimké-Welds found the Graham diet especially compelling, and used it as a means to embody and visualize their belief systems.

My topic is situated at the intersection of various fields of history, many of which have been thoroughly studied—culinary and dietary history, medical history, antebellum history, and the like. The Grimkés and the Welds are also well studied. In comparison, the Graham diet is remarkably understudied. The most influential work on the Graham diet today is Stephen

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2 The Grimké-Weld family refers to Theodore Weld and Angelina Grimké, as well as her sister Sarah Grimké.
Nissenbaum’s *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform*, the second edition of which was published in 1988. That book is the first biography of Sylvester Graham. Nissenbaum argues that Graham’s theories triggered the emergence of Victorian sexual norms, and links Grahamism with rise of powerful bourgeoisie. However, this book, like many others, is too heavily focused on Graham’s theories of sex and the body, as opposed to other aspects of Grahamism, like the influence of religion.

Frequently, Graham is a feature of books that focus on vegetarianism, or 19th century health, but he’s rarely the main focus. Adam Shprintzen’s *The Vegetarian Crusade: The Rise of an American Reform Movement, 1817-1921*, published in 2013, surveys the early history of the vegetarian movement. Shprintzen devotes multiple chapters to Graham, but his main focus is on using Graham to illustrate how the practice of vegetarian living evolved, and how the meanings of adhering to a vegetarian diet changed over time. He argues that antebellum era vegetarianism was specifically connected with reform efforts of the day.

Kyla Wazana Thompkins, in her comparatively recent *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century*, focuses on a completely different aspect of the Graham philosophy. While the book is meant to constitute an overview of the 19th century culture of eating, directly linking eating with “performative production of raced and gendered bodies,” a good

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3 The first edition was published in 1980.
portion of the book is focused on Graham and his ethos.\textsuperscript{4} Thompkins discusses the xenophobic and imperialist undertones of the Graham diet, but does so through the lens of queer theory, without discussing the diet as it was actually practiced.

While Catherine Beecher wrote a biography of the Grimké sisters in 1885, a few years after their deaths, Gerda Lerner’s \textit{The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women’s Rights and Abolition}, originally published in 1967, was the first biography of the pair published since. In addition to providing a veritable treasure trove of information on the sisters, as well as sketching a detailed portrait of Theodore Weld, Lerner fascinatingly reveals the distinct personalities of all three.

Carol Berkin’s \textit{Civil War Wives: The Life and Times of Angelina Grimké Weld, Varina Howell Davis, and Julia Dent Grant}, published in 2009, provides a comprehensive biography of Angelina Grimké. Sarah Grimké burnt much of her correspondence before her death, and unlike Angelina, did not keep a diary. Therefore, much of the general scholarship on the Grimké sisters focuses heavily upon Angelina. \textit{Civil War Wives}, true to its title, focuses on the wives of three major figures within the civil war—Theodore Weld, Jefferson Davis, and Ulysses Grant. As wives of influential men, they stood between “the powerful and the anonymous, the famous and the ordinary.”\textsuperscript{5} While technically only a third of the book is devoted to


Angelina Grimké, the section gives a detailed depiction of her life, especially encounters with and struggles against the gender conventions of the time.

Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond’s *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké* gave more weight to Weld’s correspondence. Much information regarding Weld’s perspectives can be gleaned from these two volumes, but given that the book’s title advertises an equal focus on all three figures, the disparity is disappointing. Robert H. Abzug’s *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform*, published in 1980, examines Weld’s life, with a special focus on his inner thought process and private life, but little about his diet.

Past authors have treated Graham as an episode in a larger story of reform movements, vegetarianism, or medical history. These projects are thus very large in scope. The existing work on the Grimké-Welds primarily focuses on their abolitionist work or their personal relationships with each other. No author devotes significant space to discussing the Grimké-Welds’ diet and how it fits into their lives, or discusses the relationship between the Graham diet and the Grimké-Welds’ activism.

Given the specificity of the Graham diet—its rigid requirements and proscriptions—it is unlikely that anyone adopted it mindlessly. In this thesis, I will be examining the Graham diet as it was laid out in the official literature, as well as how it was practiced by the Grimké-Welds.

In the first chapter, I will examine the dietary landscape of the 19th century, in order to understand the conditions in which the Graham diet was developed. I will discuss how the Graham diet was a product of the 19th
century, and how industrial, technological, and culinary change contributed to Graham’s theories.

In the second chapter, I will examine four seminal texts of the Graham diet—*Lectures on Bread and Breadmaking, A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, Lectures on the Science of Human Life,* and *A Defense of the Graham System of Living.* A close reading of these texts reveals an implicit connection between food and political development. I will explain how Graham utilized his diet to discuss his views of what a modern civilization should look like.

In the third chapter, I will focus on the Grimké-Weld family and explore how they practiced the diet. I will attempt to contextualize the family within the period, in order to understand how the Grimké-Welds fit into the larger community of American abolitionists and health-minded reformers. I will explore how the family utilized dietary reform, specifically the Graham diet and the Free Produce Movement, as a means to visualize their ideal world.

I will conclude by expanding the scope of the discussion. Given the constant concern over what is being put into our bodies, it seems appropriate to take space to explore how the Grimké-Welds and the Graham diet relate to our current approach towards food and food systems.
Chapter 1

Poet of Branbread and Pumpkins: Sylvester Graham and the Food of the Early Republic

In this chapter, I will discuss Sylvester Graham’s background, as well as the dietary, social, and intellectual conditions that led him to formulate his theories. I will then discuss these theories of living, with special attention to his views on physiology, diet, sex, and medicine. The Graham diet was vegetarian, but vegetarianism was not novel by the start of the 19th century. However, Graham’s diet went considerably beyond vegetarian, and his theories of diet and the body are a unique product of their antebellum contexts.

Sylvester Graham was born into a noble family. His Great-Grandfather was a Scottish Marquis of Montrose, and his family was “notable for scholars, physicians, lawyers and diplomats.” Both Graham’s father, John Graham Jr. and grandfather, John Graham Sr., were well known Connecticut reverends, and were active participants in the first Great Awakening. A short biography enclosed with Lectures on the Science of Human Life relays this grandiose description of his childhood:

Though without cultivation, he was naturally clever, and asserted and maintained a superiority among his playmates; and in whatever society he was thrown into, his powers of description, his imagination, his active and stirring spirit, always made him a center of attraction. But as distinction always brings envy, he made both friends and enemies, and had much to suffer from persecution.

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6 I use the term “vegetarian” for convenience’s sake, but that specific term was not used in the nineteenth century.
Testimonials suggest that Graham maintained this sort of an opinion of himself through much of his life.

Graham the Temperance Lecturer

His career began in 1823, when at age 29, he gave a lecture on temperance in his home of West Suffield, Connecticut. That same year, he attended Amherst to begin his training to become a minister, like his father and grandfather. He found great difficulties there, and, suffering from exhaustion, he was dismissed from the university under the charges of “assault.”\(^9\) He then married, and resumed his studies under a local minister. By 1826, he had received a license to preach, and by 1828, he was ordained as an evangelist. He found work as a preacher in Belvedere, New Jersey, and then as an acting minister about 40 miles away in Bound Brook. However, he soon lost the favor of the community when he preached too vehemently in favor of temperance. Sensing that public opinion was turning against him, Graham left his position, and became a lecturing agent for the Pennsylvania Temperance Society.

The public lecture was a unique invention of the 19\(^{th}\) century. Donald M. Scott refers to the public lecture as a “form of instruction distinguished from the sermon, speech, and oration as well as from the treatise or essay.”\(^{10}\) They attracted audiences in communities both big and small—in New York City, over 3,000 lectures were planned in the period between 1840 and 1860.

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But there were between 3,500 and 4,000 smaller communities that possessed a sponsoring organization for public lectures.\textsuperscript{11} Lectures were considered a major public attraction, and were routinely advertised in public newspapers, even if the lectures themselves were being given miles away. While the lecture audience was generally diverse, it was primarily dominated by non-rural, American-born, young people in their twenties and early thirties. They were “aspiring and ambitious, personally, socially, or culturally,” and hoped to improve their future prospects through gaining knowledge, of any sort.\textsuperscript{12}

The life of an itinerant lecturer was a difficult one. There was no defined path to success, and building a loyal audience was difficult. The field was overcrowded with young men attempting to make their living as a lecturer, and it was difficult to distinguish oneself and attract the same audience. Furthermore, engagements at local lecture halls were most easily gained via community networks, which many traveling young men did not possess. Scott also notes that, “With the partial exception of science and theology, there were few if any clearly bounded ‘communities of the competent’ to which one directed intellectual production and which certified its standing as knowledge and meted out position and prestige.”\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, prospective lecturers were essentially striking out blind, hoping to attract any individual who might have merely a passing interest in the subject.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 801.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 796.
There was no typical lecturer. Speakers ranged from local authority figures, lawyers, physicians, clergymen, critics, and journalists, to professors. However, the more common category, from which Sylvester Graham hailed, was that of reformer. The 1820s and 30s saw a massive wave of reforming sentiment, which was channeled into movements such as abolitionism, women’s rights, and temperance. Public lectures were often the best way to promote one’s cause. Thus, the rise of the lecture as popular entertainment was facilitated by the burgeoning American reformist project. These social reform efforts also coincided with the Second Great Awakening, an emotional religious revivalist movement. Yet, while the Great Awakening was a movement that enraptured the entire nation, reform efforts were generally located within the Northeast. Though many well-known reformers, Graham included, were influenced and driven by Christianity, different sects had their own specific causes. The liberal Unitarians championed abolitionism and women’s rights, whereas Evangelists were supported complete temperance.

While drunkenness had always been frowned upon within American society, the American Temperance Society, established in 1826, was the first official organization devoted to discouraging the use of “ardent spirits.” Interestingly, the consumption of fermented beverages was not discouraged, as such beverages were reportedly consumed during biblical times. The Society successfully encouraged the formation of 229 local temperance

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14 Ibid., 794.
societies by 1826, with another thousand added by 1830, all devoted to abstaining from distilled liquor. In Philadelphia, where Graham lived, there were 30 societies established by 1834. Temperance stores and hotels, which neither sold nor served alcohol, were built to accommodate these new converts in their purchasing and traveling needs. Much of the societies’ leadership and members derived from religious organizations. However, some believed that abstinence from spirits was not enough. In 1836, the American Temperance Union was founded under the philosophy of complete abstinence from alcohol. But within the broader temperance movement, few elected to go that far. From Ralph Waldo Emerson’s perspective, the temperance movement, along with dietary reform, was the forefront of American reform efforts.

It made sense that Graham would become a temperance lecturer. Graham had held a lifelong distrust of alcohol. While he first avoided alcohol due to the taste, a certain event in his early adulthood cemented his objections. As Graham relayed to the *Northampton Courier*, his friends, despite their knowledge that Graham refused to attend a party with alcohol, tricked him into attending a party in which rum was served. His friends made fun of him when he refused to drink, and Graham angrily left the party, thus cementing his commitment to temperance. Simultaneously, by the late 1820s, the national temperance movement was increasing in popularity.

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17 Shprintzen, 18.  
18 Nissenbaum, 72.  
19 Tompkins, 56.  
20 Nissenbaum, 11-12.
Lyman Beecher’s *Six Sermons on Intemperance* was published in 1826, inspiring the formation of a large number of local temperance societies. Beecher refuted the commonly held idea that only heavy drinking was harmful. Even the occasional drink was harmful on both a moral and physiological level, a philosophy to which Graham’s writing also adhered.

Graham began his temperance lecturing career in Philadelphia in 1830. Graham also lectured beyond the city, in the rapidly industrializing suburbs of Kensington and Northern Liberties, where Graham was evidently talented in persuading factory workers to give up their daily portion of alcohol.\(^{21}\) Graham distinguished himself from other temperance lecturers by warning the public about the effects of alcohol on the human system. Lecturers like Beecher were afraid of the drunken behavior that alcohol caused, as well as the pain of addiction. But Graham feared the unnatural physiological stimulation, irritation, and pain that alcohol wrecked upon the body.\(^{22}\) As Graham was not concerned with the bad habits that were specifically associated with alcohol consumption, he was able to condemn every sort of stimulating beverage in every quantity.

To Graham, this new train of thought also suggested that temperance could no longer stand as a separately defined reform movement. It was inescapably linked to dietary and health reform, rather than moral reform. Thus, in November of 1830, Graham began combining temperance and

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 79.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 80.
physiology in his lectures, and spoke on “The Health, Happiness, and Long Life of Man.”

In New England, most of the temperance leaders were clergy members, but in Philadelphia, they were primarily medical professionals. The presence of medical professionals within the ranks likely encouraged Graham to investigate temperance from a physiological standpoint. Graham began reading works by a number of doctors, scientists, and theorists—including Luigi Cornaro, Benjamin Rush, Xavier Bichat, and François Broussais.

Graham read Cornaro’s 1558 tract, Discourses on a Sober and Temperate Life, and evidently found it so compelling that he prepared an American edition in 1832. Cornaro’s theories were humoral, claiming that health can only be achieved if there were an internal balance of the four classical elements—earth, air, water, and fire. But food could not provide all four, and therefore gluttony caused severe imbalance. “Regularity and moderation” in all things were necessary elements to a good life. But unlike Graham, Cornaro’s theories found room for moderate amounts of meat and wine. Promoting views very different than Cornaro’s, Benjamin Rush provided Graham with the idea that debility could be caused by either too much or too little stimulation. He also believed that there was only one disease, which manifested itself differently depending on the variety of stimulation, deprivation, or indulgence that an individual was facing.

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23 Ibid., 74.
24 Ibid., 42.
25 Ibid., 56.
In *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America*, Stephen Nissenbaum suggests that this new angle made Graham’s lectures too extreme for the Society. As a result, Graham began lecturing independently, and announced a new lecture series in May of 1831 on the Science of Human Life. This series, located at the Franklin Institute, was limited only to individuals with subscription tickets. Subscriptions were a new innovation and suggested “that Graham had ceased to see himself as an evangelist preaching to whoever might happen to come. It also suggested that he had consciously come to see his temperance message as just a single plank in a much wider platform—a platform too complex to be constructed in a single lecture.”

This new angle was revealed in the midst of 1832’s cholera epidemic. In that year, the disease made its way to North America, triggering numerous health-based articles on cholera from a variety of perspectives. These articles often contained conflicting advice for the reader, further increasing the panic. Graham gave a lecture on cholera as well, which was so popular that it was frequently repeated. In his speech, Graham told audiences that the cause of cholera was rooted in irritation of the stomach. But it was modern life—man’s removal from a “pure state of nature”—that was causing this irritability. The “debilitating” advancements included housing, dress, transportation, and diet.

The Graham Diet, versus the American Diet

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26 Ibid., 82.
28 Nissenbaum, 91.
The diet was central to the Graham system of living. While diet was but one part of a larger system of good living, fourteen out of the twenty-four lectures included in his Science of Human Life series were focused on food and eating. There was a strong emphasis on homemade whole wheat bread, to the point that whole wheat flour was commonly known as “Graham Flour”. Most notably, the diet was extremely prohibitive and rigid in its proscriptions. Graham summarized his diet thusly:

Distilled spirits, wine, beer, cider, tobacco, opium, coffee, tea, pepper, mustard, and every other kind of artificial stimulants and narcotics,—fluid and solid—should be totally abandoned; and if the invalid is much diseased, he should totally abstain from all animal food, including butter and milk,—or taking the last in small and diluted quantities. Pure water, and toast water, and water gruel, should be the only liquids received in to the stomach. The solid forms of food should be taken in the natural and simple state, and plainly prepared, or cooked with no other seasoning than a very little salt, and eaten in moderate quantities, at regular periods—not too frequently—well masticated or chewed, and swallowed slowly. The bowels should be kept regular by unbolted wheat meal bread and fruit. Let the last meal of the day be simple and light and at a good distance from bed time. Never sleep on a full stomach.29

With the emphasis and zeal that Graham placed on such simple foods, it is no wonder that Emerson referred to Graham as the “poet of branbread and pumpkins.”30 Graham saw such food as best adapted to the “anatomical structure and physiological powers of the human system.” If the food consumed was appropriately simple, plain, and natural, adherents would find themselves "healthy, vigorous, and long lived,” with “perfect senses” and powerful “intellectual and moral faculties.”31

30 Tompkins, 64.
31 Lectures on the Science of Human Life, 311.
Another habit that Graham found concerning was the American tendency to overeat. As Richard Shyrock humorously quipped, “No one would dare estimate the exact degree to which earlier generations overate, but gormandizing was certainly one of their favorite indoor sports.” An everyday table might have contained three varieties of meat. A festive event hosted by a wealthy patron might boast “thirty or more kinds of meat and fish,” and could last well into the night. But as Susan Williams points out, these endless spreads were meant to indicate hospitality and pay homage to America’s abundance, a meaning that many shocked European observers were unable to grasp. In her 1832 cookbook, *The American Frugal Housewife*, Lydia Child provided recipes for corned beef, salted ham, tongue, liver, mutton rack, heart, beef chuck, rump, and sirloin, veal shoulder, breast, loin, and hind quarter, lamb leg and loin, pig’s head, calf’s head, alamode beef, sausages, minced meat, souse, meat gravy, fricasseed chicken, curried fowl, and chicken broth. Meat was prepared quite heavily, frequently roasted in fatty joints or fried in massive quantities of butter or lard. Birds were boiled whole. Even more mainstream writers, like the influential domestic economist and arbiter of taste Sarah Josepha Hale, who edited *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, recognized the pitfalls of the American diet. In *The Good Housekeeper’s*

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34 Head cheese pickled in vinegar.
preface, she writes, “Foreigners say that our climate is unhealthy; that Americans have, generally, thin forms, sallow complexions and bad teeth. Is it not most likely that these defects are incurred, in part if not wholly, because the diet and modes of living are unsuitable to the climate, and consequently to the health of the people?” Hale thus suggested that some dietary reforms would be beneficial to the health of Americans. Hale’s suggestions certainly did not match those of Graham in level of intensity, but their admission is notable. Evidently, Graham was not attempting to attract an entirely unreceptive audience, at least where diet was concerned.

Of course, Americans ate more than just meat. Fish, eggs, and dairy products like cheese, butter, cream, and milk were also frequently consumed. Common grains included wheat, of course, but also rye, barley, oats, rice, and corn. Coffee, tea, and alcoholic beverages like cider and beer were frequently consumed. Vegetables were seen merely as an accompaniment to meat dishes. The most commonly consumed vegetables were cabbage and potatoes, with peas, beans, turnips, and onions occasionally served as well.

The Origins of the Vegetable Diet

Graham was not the first to preach a vegetarian diet in America. That credit belongs to the Bible Christian Church. Founded in the early nineteenth century by William Cowherd in Manchester, England, the Church was distinguished by three main principles—temperance, pacifism, and

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37 Hale, ii.
39 Levenstein, 4.
vegetarianism.\textsuperscript{40} The Church quickly attracted the attention of one William Metcalf, who had already adopted a vegetarian diet for personal health reasons. Metcalf found the Church’s radical doctrines compelling and was ordained as a Bible Christian Minister in 1811. Six years later, Metcalf brought a number of Bible Christians to Philadelphia, and formed the Philadelphia Bible Christian Church. At that time, Philadelphia had the second-highest population in America, and was the center of a growing reform movement.\textsuperscript{41} Beyond the vegetarianism, the Bible Christians held fairly radical religious beliefs. They suggested that Jesus was not the son of God and believed that spirituality and religious sentiment could be honed and clarified in the same manner as scientific study. To Metcalf, a meat-inclusive diet violated the biblical commandment against killing, and the popularity of such a diet demonstrated humanity’s degradation. Others evidently agreed, for the Bible Christian Church’s membership doubled by 1825.\textsuperscript{42} By 1830, Graham had met Metcalf, as well as other members of the Bible Christian Church. Despite Graham’s reassurances to his readers that he formulated his dietary philosophy without any outside input, he was likely influenced heavily by Metcalf, given that they began a chain of correspondence that would continue for much of their lives.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{The Role of Bread in America}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{40} Shprintzen, 11. \\
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 12. \\
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 14. \\
\textsuperscript{43} Shprintzen, 19. 
\end{flushright}
Just as diet was central to the Graham system, bread was the centerpiece of the Graham diet. Bread was a major part of the American diet as well; more broadly, its consumption and sourcing were deeply wrapped up in the agricultural conditions of the day. Thus, to fully understand Graham’s views on bread, one must understand the American agricultural context. The first four decades of the 19th century marked the New England farmer’s transition from growing products solely for family use to selling surplus on the local market.

This transition was remarkably slow, and it is evident that farmers found it difficult to conceive of specializing to maximize profit. In *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870*, Clarence H. Darrow provides examples of advice to farmers on how to best select the crops to bring to market. These tidbits of advice were published within a twenty-year timespan, but they essentially communicate the same basic advice—find what crop is most profitable in your region, and then produce it. The advice from 1852, taken from *Plough, Loom, and Anvil*, also provided some moral support to farmers afraid to make the transition:

> Let our farmers study their true interests. Let them not stand while others are going ahead. Let them be up and doing something to supply the wants of towns and cities in their vicinity; and not the necessities only, but the tastes also. Let them raise flowers even if it will pay a profit. Why not?44

The writer reveals the deeply entrenched roots of subsistence farming within New England, as well as farmers’ evident discomfort in farming for a profit.

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However, such changes were necessary, as Eastern farmers were facing conditions that made wheat-growing considerably difficult. After decades of overuse, the New England soil was becoming exhausted, and the farms were not ideally set up for mass production. The wheat crops were threatened by pests like the wheat midge, rust, and the Hessian fly, which had an especially brutal attack on crops in 1819. Finally, competition from western states like Ohio made wheat-growing in New England considerably less profitable.\textsuperscript{45} Simultaneously, young men and women were leaving farms to work in factories or start their own farms in the West, therefore increasing the price of labor at an already unfortunate time.

In the West, wheat was grown as a cash crop, and the nearby Great Lakes and Erie Canal made transportation cheap and fast.\textsuperscript{46} These factors allowed Western wheat flour to be sold at a cost lower than that with which Eastern farmers could compete. Compounding this issue were Eastern farmers’ inexperience with the market, as well as their discomfort with selling products for profit, as discussed above. However, in order to make a living, adjustments had to be made. By 1840, western flour was used widely in New England by both farmers and city dwellers. Trade increased rapidly. In 1836, 1,239,000 bushels of grain and flour traveled down the Erie Canal to Buffalo. But by 1851, this quantity increased to 17,741,000 bushels.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 169.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 310.
The American bread market involved more than merely wheat farmers. For those who were unable to make bread themselves, bakeries were available to transform the wheat crop into bread. Within the cities of America, bakeries were fairly ubiquitous. As early as 1664, there were 10 bakeries in New York. In Europe, bakeries or public bake houses, in which women brought their raw dough to be baked, could be found in even the smallest of towns. In contrast, most Americans lived in rural settings, where bakeries were not useful. American bakeries sold ready-made bread specifically in an urban context, for the urban workers. There were logistical difficulties associated with baking bread that made home baking difficult in the city. As Susan Strasser notes, ovens for bread baking needed to be custom built, and were thus rare. Later, cast-iron stoves became available, but they required fuel, and often overheated the entire home in summer.48 Bakers’ bread was therefore a more economical choice for those who did not have the time, money, or extra hands to make bread in the home.

Yet, many regarded commercial baking with suspicion. It was no secret that in certain bakeries of Europe, flour was often adulterated with a number of additional substances. While bakers started with harmless adulterants like bean flour, which was merely used as bulk matter, they soon began to utilize harmful chemicals like sulphate of copper, also known as blue vitriol, which was used as a leavening agent. The addition of blue vitriol made the production of bread cheaper and more convenient, as it “contributed to

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hasten the fermentation, to cause the dough to retain more water, to diminish
the labor of kneading, and produce a lighter and finer looking bread from the
defective or the mixed flour.” While advantageous to bakers, sulphate of
copper was harmful enough to the public that a number of bakers in Brussels
were condemned by a correctional tribunal for using sulphate of copper in
their breadmaking. Graham cited this case in his Treatise as well, so perhaps
trials like these were common knowledge. In addition to bean flour and
sulphate of copper, bakers used alum, sulphate of zinc, sub-carbonate of
magnesia, sub-carbonate of ammonia and other alkaline sub-carbonates, and
other substances like chalk, clay, and plaster. The adulteration of flour and
bread was deemed a serious enough threat that multiple tribunals were held
by authorities in order to chemically analyze bread and determine if it was
safe to eat. A scientific report by M. Kuhlmann concluded with instructions as
to how consumers could detect adulterations in their own bread, as well as a
call to action directed towards chemists. Kuhlmann wrote:

> It is this continued ignorance with respect to the chemistry of the art,
which causes bakers to lay so great a stress upon every secret
process...To obtain a whiter, more porous, and finer grained bread, and
in greater quantity from a given weight of flour, and in greater quantity
from a given weight of flour, and at the same time to dispense with the
preparation of leaven, are advantages too great to prevent the
apprehension that they will be greatly abused, and the public health
grossly neglected. The proper authorities ought not to be inactive in a
matter of such importance.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) Ibid, 279.
However, discussions over flour quality were not limited to dense scientific articles. Sarah Josepha Hale’s *The Good Housekeeper* included detailed instructions on how to easily detect adulterated flour and bread, indicating that fears over adulterated bread was not limited to the radicals and educated scientists of the day. But beyond fears of harmful ingredients, homemade bread seemed to be understood by many as simply better than bakery bread.

Hale asserted, “The bread [of public bakers] is, to be sure, nearly tasteless, and it cannot be equally nourishing as good flour would make; but if it looks well, it will sell. Those who bake their own bread have the opportunity of knowing that it is made of good ingredients; and if they make it after the following recipe, they may be sure of good bread.”

Godey’s Lady’s Book, which Hale also edited, was a publication solidly geared towards middle class women, and presumably Hale’s other works like *The Good Housekeeper* were intended for the same audience. While Hale’s average reader may have been swayed by her convincing rhetoric, those who needed to patronize bakeries would have been unable to utilize any alternative.

In her examination of bread-baking in American society, Kyla Wazana Tompkins noted that bread recipes were rarely seen in early American cookbooks, and suggested their absence implies that “baking bread was too widely known about and done in the eighteenth century for the recipe books

to pay it any heed.” Yet, in the antebellum period, a significant number of cookbooks and domestic guides contained recipes for baking bread, along with warnings against overeating. Thompkins thus concluded that bread was seen as the key to creating a healthy and engaged American people. In *The Good Housekeeper*, Sarah Hale placed her chapter concerning bread first in the volume, for she considered the “art of making good bread...the most important one in cookery.” She did however include a qualifier, stating that despite her emphasis on good bread, she did not believe it was as valuable as meat, or that she was an advocate for a vegetarian diet. Before even discussing recipes for bread-making, Hale justifies her support for a mixed diet, including “bread, meat, vegetables, and fruit, [or] the only right regimen for the healthy.” Evidently, vegetable diets were fairly well known at the time, enough that Hale believed she had to prove she did not advocate for them. But simultaneously, the text showed just how unusual vegetarians truly were at the time.

**Graham’s Theory of the Body**

Through his lecture series, *Science of Human Life*, Graham articulated a unified argument for the vegetable diet. Graham argued that human physiology, like the composition of teeth and organization of organs, proved that a vegetable diet was the natural diet of man. He also indicated a variety of

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53 Thompkins, 58.
54 Ibid., 62-3.
55 Hale, 9.
historical exemplars of good vegetarian living—namely, Plutarch, Ovid, Hesiod, and Pythagoras.  

Graham’s theory of the body was premised on the constant need to maintain internal balance. The maintenance of such a system was seen as a lifelong pursuit. Graham wrote, “From the commencement to the termination of the vital existence of organized bodies, therefore, life maintains a continual conflict with opposing forces: and hence has...been said, that ‘life a forced state,’ — ‘a temporary victory over the causes which induce death.”

Overstimulation, especially of the nerves, threw off this tenuous order. The nervous system was especially important to the functioning of the body, for “by the vital powers of the nerves, the properties of the other tissues are called into exercise, and the functions of all the organs are performed.”

Inappropriate foods like meat, alcohol, and spices, and inappropriate practices, overstimulated the body, and threw off its perfectly configured internal system of regulation. An unregulated body was a vulnerable body. Given that “all the nerves of organic life [were] intimately woven together in a common web of sympathy,” the irritation of the nerves in one certain area would translate into a full breakdown of bodily function. Furthermore, if the body became accustomed to food and habits that diverted from Graham’s recommendations, the body would inevitably become dependent upon such debilitating foods and actions. This dependence would cause the body to lose

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56 Shprintzen, 21.  
57 Lectures on the Science of Human Life, 43.  
58 Ibid., 68.  
59 Sylvester Graham, A Lecture on Epidemic Diseases Generally, and Particularly the Spasmodic Cholera (Boston: Published by David Campbell, 1838), 9.
sensitivity to external stimuli, further decreasing resistance against disease. Additionally, dependency altered one’s ability to think clearly and rationally. Graham utilized the example of a man addicted to tobacco in order to illustrate this concept. He explains:

Suppose we should attempt to convince that man that morally and naturally wrong to chew tobacco, or use in any way as means of sensual gratification. Now, in the first place, that man’s tobacco has impaired the delicacy of his moral sense. In the second place, has in some degree impaired the nice powers of the understanding to perceive moral truth. In the third place, has established in the physiological economy of his body, an appetite whose despotic and often irresistible influence upon the intellectual and voluntary powers, vehemently urges and even absolutely compels the understanding and will to comply with its demands.\textsuperscript{60}

In summary, disease was to be found everywhere, but it only presented a significant risk in an addicted, and thus weakened, body. Cholera, like all other diseases, was thus not necessarily fatal. As Nissenbaum writes, “Cholera was fatal only when the organic nervous system had been so seriously impaired by prolonged exposure to artificial stimulation that it was incapable of responding in a natural way when beset by irritation. Under such conditions vomiting and diarrhea, instead of relieving the irritation, served only to increase irritation.”\textsuperscript{61} What made disease especially harmful, then, were the debilitating habits that had been developed in order to live within modern, or “artificial” life. To Graham, cholera was both a symptom and a symbol of how far humanity had fallen, and only the most rigorous diets and regimens could prevent it. Later historians have concluded that cholera

\textsuperscript{60} Lectures on the Science of Human Life, 245.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 94.
reached American shores specifically via marketplace routes. Therefore, the new global economy, to which Graham was objecting, did actually cause the North American cholera epidemic.\(^\text{62}\)

Deviant sexual habits were also identified as a cause of disease. The scientists of the day identified India as the source of the cholera epidemic. To Graham, this evaluation made sense, for Indians were known to be “indolent, sensual, and licentious”—at least, according to Graham.\(^\text{63}\) Graham believed that Indians’ food choice compelled them to act in such a way. While meat did not constitute a major part of the Indian diet, the food was heavily spiced, comparatively. Additionally, Indians were frequent users of tobacco, opium, and alcohol. Graham also claimed that a great number of Parisian prostitutes died of cholera as a result of their occupation, and not of their impoverished living situation and poor diets, as many other physicians believed.

Thus, to Graham, careful regulation of sexuality was another major contributor to bodily health. Sexuality was associated with both organic and animal life. Organic life made up of the “organs and powers concerned in the grand function of nutrition: such as...digestion, respiration, circulation, secretion, absorption, excretion, etc.” Animal life was made up of the “organs and powers of sensation, voluntary movement, and volition.”\(^\text{64}\) While semen production was part of the organic system, the act of having sex was associated with the animal system. Due to this duality, the reproductive

\(^\text{62}\) Ibid., 97.
\(^\text{63}\) Ibid., 99.
\(^\text{64}\) A Lecture on Epidemic Diseases Generally, and Particularly the Spasmodic Cholera, 7–8
organs were directly connected to both the brain and the digestive system. They were the only organs with this unique property. Thus, the brain and genitals acted reciprocally. While sexual thoughts affected the genitals, an “excited state” of the genitals would also produce sexual thoughts.\(^6^5\) Furthermore, this meant that one’s sexuality influenced the entire body. Graham explained, “sexual desire...when it kindles into a passion, its influence is so extensive and powerful, that it disturbs and disorders all the functions of the system.” Systems affected included digestion, circulation, and respiration. The general function of the nervous system, as well as the ability to think clearly, was also negatively affected.\(^6^6\)

Masturbation was a particular concern, and Graham considered the “solitary vice” to be “wholly unnatural” and especially damaging. For unlike sex, masturbation required some amount of imagination, leading to costly mental expenditure. Once the body was exposed to this course of action, the genital organs could only become excited by mental thoughts, as opposed to natural bodily needs. In this way, “Illicit commerce between the sexes” was more harmful than sex between spouses. The secret affair resulted in significant mental expenditure, due to the need for planning and the secret excitement associated with the deed.\(^6^7\) In contrast, sex between a married couple required less mental work, as the two individuals were already well acquainted with each other’s bodies and habits. Graham also identified a

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 105.

\(^{66}\) Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity: Intended Also for the Serious Consideration of Parents and Guardians.* (Boston: George W. Light, 1840), 5.

\(^{67}\) Nissenbaum, 118.
special connection between food and sexual thoughts. Foods that departed from the Graham system were said to cause nocturnal emissions, and multiple testimonials reported that such emissions ceased when foods like meat and coffee were eliminated.68

Graham was not the only individual concerned with sex and masturbation. The Swiss physician Samuel Tissot, despite dying just before the turn of the nineteenth century, was still the most frequently cited anti-masturbation advocate of the period. He first promoted the idea that masturbation, specifically the loss of semen and act of orgasm, caused debility. Many subsequent anti-onanists shared this belief. However, Graham differed from them in his assessment. Instead of focusing on the loss of semen, he believed that the “convulsive paroxysms” that result from “venereal indulgence” cause “the most intense excitement,” in all bodily organs. Thus, sexual desire brought “the most powerful agitation to the whole system that it is ever subject to.”69

Graham illuminated these theories in his "Lectures to Young Men on Chastity.” While he delivered these lectures to both male and mixed gender audiences with little complaint, his attempts to preach the dangers of masturbation to an all-female audience caused much controversy and protest. In Boston, Graham attempted to give such a lecture, and encountered a mob of a thousand angry men and boys, but also hundreds of interested women.70

68 A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, 147-8.
69 A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, 5.
However controversial, these lectures encouraged the students of Cincinnati’s Lane Theological Seminary to recommend Graham for a position within their Natural Philosophy department.\(^7^1\)

Graham seemed to be afraid of man’s uncontrolled instincts. The voracious desire for food, just like the voracious desire for sex, both indicated and threatened sickness. The key word, however, is “uncontrolled.” Graham noted that feelings of hunger or sexual desire could be considered healthy only if the body was in a healthy condition. Only then could lust reflect the natural functioning of organs, rather than unhealthy habits. Graham believed, like most reformers, that natural instincts were healthy and right. But people would also inherently be self-destructive. As Nissenbaum summarized:

“Graham believed...the destructive behavior that pervaded modern society was based not on natural instinct at all, but on a constellation of artificial needs...that had been generated by the pressures of modern civilization. Nineteenth-century Americans might crave too much of the wrong kind of food, just as they might crave too much of the wrong kind of sex—but neither of these cravings reflected real psychological needs...The demands imposed by natural hunger were invariably modest and benign.\(^7^2\)

The correct sort of living, one driven by natural instincts and cravings, would reduce the need for medical professionals. The Grahamite’s distrust of the medical establishment was quite apparent. In *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, the unidentified author of the introduction wrote, “These Lectures...do not usurp the position usually taken by the profession of medicine. Medical science may go on in its routine of drugs, leeches, and

\(^{7^1}\) Scott, 799.

\(^{7^2}\) Nissenbaum, 126.
mercury; and if the people will have the moral courage and resolution to adopt a rational and healthful system of diet, such as Graham prescribes, they would well-nigh declare their independence of the ordinary medical treatment.” If readers could overcome their fear, they would soon understand the benefits of Graham’s advice. It is accurate that many tenets of the established medical practice did not truly contribute to improved health. In asserting the superiority of his own system over modern medicine, Graham implied to the audience that his hygienic principles could actually replace medical practice.74

Reactions to the Graham System

It is quite understandable why Graham’s audience eagerly looked for alternatives to modern medicine. In the early 19th century, techniques like bleeding were still widely practiced. Furthermore, there was a proliferation of mineral-based patent medicines, which had no quality standards, or even a guarantee that they would work as promised. In Science of Human Life, Graham refers to vendors of patent medicines as “creatures wearing human shape... among the very worst enemies of their species...for... they destroy the lives of hundreds.” Given this, it is understandable that frustrated individuals might easily turn to an alternative to standard medical practice. In this area, one would have had many options. A number of alternative medical sects appeared in this time, which included the Thomasonian, eclectic,  

73 Ibid., 4.  
74 Shyrock, 179.  
75 Lectures on the Science of Human Life, 426.
homeopathic, or hydropathic systems of medicine. What distinguished these sects from established medical practice was their choice of treatment, which was rooted in older herb-based healing traditions. Potential cures could also be found in a wide number of print materials, which included domestic guides, popular periodicals, almanacs, and publications of niche groups—which would have included the Grahamites. A quotation on the title page of Lectures on the Science of Human Life read, “Know Thyself,” encouraging the reader to be their own physician, and choose the health regimen that would work best for themselves.

Many were unconvinced by Graham’s rhetoric. The riots in response to Graham’s masturbation lectures have already been discussed. However, Graham’s dietary proscriptions also triggered public disorder. An 1837 lecture in Boston provoked a mob of angry bakers and butchers, who feared that they would lose business. There was also more subtle resistance to Graham’s position. David Campbell, the editor of the Graham Journal of Health and Longevity, was selected to run the Oberlin College boarding hall according to Graham’s principles, which alienated many students and professors. Professor John P. Cowles objected to this change, and brought his personal pepper.

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shaker when he took his meals. Professor Cowles’ shaker was removed by the trustees, and he was later dismissed from the College.\footnote{Robert Samuel Fletcher, \textit{A History of Oberlin College: From Its Foundation Through the Civil War} (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly & Sons Company, 1943), 326.}

But the Graham diet found a number of satisfied converts. Graham’s lectures were sold out, and his testimonial book was filled to the brim with the signatures. Sometimes, these signatures came with stories as well, which ranged from a few sentences to an entire page in length. Graham published an entire book of such testimonials, entitled \textit{The Aesculapian Tablets of the Nineteenth Century}. In one testimonial from 1833, Eliza G. Hunt writes,

> For seven years, I had been afflicted with the Jaundice...I need not enter into a description of the distressing head-aches, back-aches, and various other aches, which are attendant upon this complaint...My physician...candidly told me, that medicine would not remove it...I experienced no relief, until I was induced by a friend to attend your course of lectures last winter...From that time I have thrown aside all medicines, tea and coffee, pastry, warm bread, meat, and various other articles of which you disapprove; and I have in consequence thrown aside the Jaundice, and all disagreeable symptoms attending it. I feel as if my youth was renewed.\footnote{Sylvester Graham, \textit{The Aesculapian Tablets of the Nineteenth Century}. (Providence: Weeden and Cory, 1834) 34-35.}

The great majority of the testimonials in the book followed a similar format. An individual was afflicted with a serious illness, which standardized medical practice had been unable to cure. Only with the help of the Graham diet could the subject finally be free of the disease and gain a new lease on life. Grahamites varied greatly in degrees of adherence to the cause. Some were more subdued in their devotion, perhaps merely baking the bread, and adhering to a meatless diet. Others were more vigorous, intentionally creating a “Grahamite community through building and living in public institutions.
aimed at gaining converts and saving lost carnivores.”

These Grahamite communal boarding houses were primarily located in the urban Northeast. They offered a hard mattress to sleep upon, vegetarian meals, mandated exercise, and regular cold baths—all aspects of the Grahamite regime. When cities were seen as hotbeds of danger and vice, a Grahamite boardinghouse acted as a refuge to young, middle-class men, who feared for their morals and health. Asenath Nicholson, a convert to the Grahamite system, operated a number of Grahamite boardinghouses in New York City. Nicholson had suffered from nerves and tremors, until attendance at a Graham lecture encouraged her to remake her way of living. As with many other converts, once the change was made, Nicholson was cured. She saw her houses as a means of arming these naive young men against the dangerous city. Adam Shprintzen, in his study of early Vegetarianism, offers an overview of Nicholson’s culinary offerings:

Animal flesh was barred…as were other poisons such as caffeine and alcohol…The simple meals furnished centered on vegetables and whole grains. Breakfast consisted of the omnipresent Graham bread, along with a variety of fresh fruits, including apples, peaches, cherries, and strawberries. Interestingly, eggs were allowed at the breakfast table, and were even considered an important component of Grahamite diets, despite being animal-based…Dinner…consisted primarily of hominy, rice, porridge, and a variety of seasonal vegetables including beets, potatoes, carrots, turnips, and squashes. Supper…included Graham bread, milk, oatmeal, hominy, barley gruel, or mashed cornmeal.

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80 Shprintzen, 27.
81 Ibid., 29.
82 Ibid., 30.
Grahamism and Vegetarianism were distinct movements with their own history. But as both movements entered the public consciousness in the 1830s, they were generally understood to be one and the same, as they both avoided animal products. But by the 1840s, around a decade into Graham’s career, meatless diets were no longer considered an exclusively Grahamite practice. Vegetarianism and Grahamism were finally considered separate movements. As Shprintzen wrote, “reformers further developed their principles, fusing the realms of health and science with dietary and social reform...[Reformers] linked dietary choice directly with social reform, expanding the motivations for adherence to a meatless diet.”83 A number of more generalized organizations sprang up to accommodate these interdisciplinary approaches to diet and health. The most famous of these was the American Physiological Society.84 Founded in 1837 by Sylvester Graham and William A. Alcott, the Society’s mission was “to acquire and diffuse a knowledge of the laws of life, and of the means of promoting human health and longevity.”85 The Constitution of the American Physiological Society revealed the founders’ desire to educate the public on principles of physiology, and their firm belief that the lessons learned from such study could truly benefit the world. They wrote,

A knowledge of human Physiology, which shall tend to such a result, they believe to be accessible, in a community like our own, to every citizen. They do not believe that the Great Creator has united the human soul...to a habitation which is acknowledge on all hands to be

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83 Ibid., 40.
84 The current American Physiological Society was established in 1887, and has no connection to the organization founded by Graham and Alcott.
fearfully and wonderfully wrought, and yet shrouded it in mystery, or hid in structure and laws wholly from common observation. They believe it...the duty of every person...to make it a subject of daily study.\textsuperscript{86}

The writers also asserted the need to study the effects of the human organs, the outer environment, and even current dress on human disease. But most important was the need to “study the dietetic nature and character of man, and to observe the changes induced on him by various articles of food and modes of cookery.”\textsuperscript{87} Thus, the American Physiological Society took up Grahamite principles as their primary influence, without explicitly naming Graham as the source. Other reform-based movements, like the water-cure (also known as hydrotherapy), and the utopian community movement were influenced by Graham, and also took up meat-free living. All such groups saw the Graham diet, and vegetarian living in general, as a “means for personal and political change.”\textsuperscript{88}

In 1850, these varied organizations came together to establish the American Vegetarian Society.\textsuperscript{89} With the variety of beliefs encompassed by the contributing organizations, vegetarianism was thus aligned with nearly all reform movements of the current day, including abolitionism, women’s rights, and pacifism.\textsuperscript{90} This new, unified movement “sought to bridge the populist dietetics of Grahamites with the physiological emphasis of William Alcott and

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 724.  
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 726.  
\textsuperscript{88} Shprintzen, 57.  
\textsuperscript{89} This is the point at which the term “Vegetarian” is more commonly used.  
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 60.
other medical doctors.”

Furthermore, they claimed that food choice came with inherent social and political ramifications.

The vegetarian diet had also shifted in focus. The Society’s first anniversary banquet contained “thirty different varieties of cooked foods,” which included baked potatoes, a variety of breads, fruit pies, custards, and puddings. The second anniversary banquet consisted of vegetable pies, fritters, omelets, sweet rice, custards, cheesecakes, and fruit pies. Much of these dishes would not have passed muster in Graham’s ideal kitchen.

But despite his major influences on vegetarian movements over the subsequent two decades, Graham himself was rarely involved. He helped organize the American Physiological Society and the American Vegetarian Society, but immediately left the running of the organizations to other individuals. By 1841, Graham had essentially retired from public speaking, settling in Northampton, Massachusetts. Although, even when he was active in public life, Graham had rarely engaged with the individuals who celebrated his diet. Beyond publishing their testimonials in *Aesculapian Tablets*, Graham did not often pay attention to his supporters. He never stayed in the Graham boardinghouses. Finally, he merely lent his name to the *Graham Journal of Health*, published by David Campbell, the man who implemented the Graham diet at Oberlin College.

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91 Ibid., 62.
92 Ibid., 66-67.
93 Nissenbaum, 14.
By the time of his death at the age of 57, illness had left Graham essentially bedridden. This was likely confusing to many in the vegetarian community, who would have logically expected that a man such as himself would have died peacefully, at a ripe old age. Indeed, Graham’s obituary, published in the *American Vegetarian and Health Journal*, made it clear that his death did not negate the vegetarian principles that he had championed. The cause of Graham’s death, the writer suggested, was due to the doctor’s refusal to carry out Graham’s idea of a “philosophical course of treatment.”

Even in death, Graham blamed the medical establishment.

The common perception of Graham is that he invented his theories out of thin air. However, that perception is false. The physiological theories that underpinned the Graham system were deeply driven by current medical thought. Graham was not the first individual to consider cutting animal products from one’s diet, and his specific proscriptions were driven by the common insecurities of the time. The Graham diet is special in that it synthesized a variety of coinciding forces into one theory of good living. But the idea of good living had implications beyond the individual. Instead, Graham saw a deep connection between diet and civilization.

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94 “Death of Sylvester Graham,” *American Vegetarian and Health Journal* 1, no. 10 (October 1851): 188.
Chapter 2

In One’s Own Domestic Threshold: The Graham Diet and American Political Development

Through his diet, Graham visualized a deep connection between diet and civilization. To him, food choice, physiology, and political development were all connected. In order to tease out the intricacies of the diet, I will be conducting a close reading of four texts central to the diet: Lectures on Bread and Breadmaking, A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, Lectures on the Science of Human Life, and A Defense of the Graham System of Living. Certainly, some of Graham’s writings manifests as nativist and xenophobic. But at root, Graham’s writings illustrate an attempt to put together the ideal diet to support what Graham saw as America’s identity—a powerful, free, democratic nation.

At first glance, it is easy to write Graham off as merely an eccentric. Certainly, the Graham diet’s prescriptions are both abnormal and oddly specific. However, Graham’s views, while extreme, are rational reactions that reflect valid societal concerns in a time when America’s food was changing dramatically, as discussed in Chapter 1. The country was exposed to new geographic areas through western expansion and global trade. Through these new experiences, Americans encountered new and unfamiliar foods, peoples, and methods of sourcing and production. Given that there were no food safety regulations at the time, there was no guarantee that even the familiar foods were safe, nutritious, or ethically produced. Put simply, it was very difficult for Americans to trust that the foods available to them would not do them
harm. Graham’s methods were unconventional and his diet restrictive, but they allowed adherents to feel, perhaps for the first time, that they could trust the foods they were consuming.

In *A Defence [sic] of the Graham System of Living: Or, Remarks on Diet and Regimen, Dedicated to the Rising Generation.*, an adherent of the Graham system, true to the title, defended the system from non-believers. While the authorship does seem to be in dispute, by closely examining the document, readers find that its claims match well with Sylvester Graham’s opinions on the subject. It is certainly possible that Graham himself wrote the *Defence* anonymously, in order to artificially shore up support for his theories.

Unfamiliar Foods, as described in *A Defense of the Graham System of Living* revealed the danger of unfamiliar foods. Specifically, this was done through the promotion of the “native” fruit, at the expense of the “foreign” fruit. The author strongly asserted that for Americans, “native fruits [were], at all times, preferable to those of foreign growth.” The orange, lemon, pineapple, date, prune, and coconut were identified as foreign fruits. It was reiterated that due to the warm climates in which they were grown and to which they were adapted, foreign fruits were not as wholesome to Americans. Native fruits, as they were raised in the same climate as the American population, were much more

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95 Many scholarly works attribute *A Defence of the Graham System of Living* to Sylvester Graham. A few works attribute the *Defence* to A. E. Foote.

96 *A Defense of the Graham System of Living, or, Remarks on Diet and Regimen: Dedicated to the Rising Generation.* (New York: W. Applegate, 1835), 143.
beneficial. The author then lists a number of other fruits, which he presumably considered to be native; the apple, pear, quince, peach, apricot, plum, cherry, watermelon, muskmelon, cucumber, pumpkin, strawberry, gooseberry, raspberry, blackberry, grape, and fig. Included were instructions on how to properly cook these fruits in order to render them most wholesome. No instructions were included for the “foreign” fruits. The author simply refused to engage with them, implying that attempts to make “foreign” fruits wholesome may be impossible.

It is important to note that while these “native” fruits may have flourished in American soil, many of them did not originate within the confines of the continental United States. While defining what is considered an “American” fruit is fairly disputed, and the commonly held mantra that cranberries, blueberries and Concord grapes are the only “Native American” fruits is disputed, many of the “native” fruits from A Defense were clearly first grown elsewhere. It is now well known that the apple, for example, originated in Kazakhstan—regardless of what the overused mantra “as American as apple pie” would suggest.

The Grahamite’s distrust of foreign foods was directed towards tea as well. Of course, tea had been well situated in American society for a long period of time. But ever since the beverage had been first introduced to Europe, a number of individuals had believed that tea, or one of its many preparations, was harmful.\textsuperscript{97} This belief was still held in Graham’s day. After

\textsuperscript{97} Specifically, green tea was often cited as a potential toxin.
noting the many debilitating and harmful effects of tea on the human system, the author suggested that “it would be a great proof of patriotic spirit, in this country, if the use of this exotic drug were either altogether abandoned, or, at least, supplied by some indigenous plants of equal flavor and superior salubrity.”\textsuperscript{98} The use of the words “exotic” and “indigenous” suggest that tea’s debilitating nature partially derives from the fact that it is not grown in American soil. This implication is compounded by the suggestion that an American-grown tea would be less harmful than tea grown in the east, but would taste just as delicious.

According to the author, rejecting foreign foods in favor of native ones would benefit the state. In order to justify this claim, the author makes an appeal to the readers’ “patriotic spirit.” In the name of patriotism, readers are encouraged to abandon tea as their beverage of choice. Food choice is thus designated as a means of increasing national power and influence. Consuming foreign-grown tea would reduce America’s power and civic engagement, but consuming American-grown tea would do the opposite. Rejecting the foreign beverage would increase the health of the American people, and thus keep the state strong. Foreign affairs were presented as an arena of competition, in which consuming specific items could help one’s country come out on top. Rejecting foreign, food-based influences was thus presented as the good, “American” action.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, 150.
In the *Defense*, food was inescapably linked with national power, and the rise and fall of empires. In an early chapter, entitled *Effects of Luxury*, the author linked luxury with the downfall of civilizations. Luxury, defined as “sumptuous viands and delicacies culled from every clime,” essentially encompassed all items prohibited by the Graham system. Thus, a simple vegetable—read, Grahamite—diet was linked to national power. The author provided numerous examples of the descent of once-great civilizations into luxury and decay. As he stated:

> Had the Spartans adhered to their diet of black broth, and never departed from the simple manners introduced by their lawgiver, what people could have overcome them, how could they have lost their freedom, or when would their existence, as a nation, have been destroyed? ...A republic cannot long maintain its existence, while its members are under the dominion of an artificial, capricious appetite...And what is the result? A degraded and servile populace, with intellects benumbed, with bodies enfeebled, and morals perverted or destroyed.\(^99\)

As the author indicated in the text, the United States was on a similar path towards destruction. It is also fascinating to note that all the ancient civilizations that the author mentions did not merely disappear after falling into decay. Rather, they were all forcibly conquered. Furthermore, the conquerors themselves soon succumbed to luxury as well. Given the amount that the early Republic compared itself to classical Greece and Rome, these comparisons would certainly have struck fear into the hearts of certain readers. They implied that just like Greece and Rome, the luxurious and sinful United States would inevitably be conquered, and become only a memory.

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\(^99\) Ibid, 12.
The author claimed that non-vegetable diets could also cause chaos and violence on the scale of the individual. Yet, when adhered to by a large group bound together through common cause, or by a singular individual of importance, a flesh diet could bring about brutality on a national scale:

Who will assert, that, had the populace of Paris satisfied their hunger at the ever-furnished table of vegetable nature, they would have lent their brutal suffrage to the proscription-list of Robespierre? Could a set of men, whose passions were not perverted by unnatural stimuli, look with coolness on an auto da fe?...Surely the bile-suffused cheek of Bonaparte, his wrinkled brow, and yellow eye, the ceaseless inquietude of his nervous system, speak no less plainly the character of his unarresting ambition, than his murders and his victories.\textsuperscript{100}

This passage, lifted from British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley’s \textit{A Vindication of the Natural Diet}, referenced well-known acts of violence in order to prove his claims, and presented an over-simplified, diet-driven retrospective of history.\textsuperscript{101} The author boldly asserted that if the French populace had only eaten vegetables, they never would have revolted, and that the Graham system would have prevented the brutality and death of the Spanish Inquisition. But beyond misunderstanding European history, the author expressed underlying fears regarding the animal diet’s power over men’s actions. The presented evidence implied a deep concern over the direction of humanity, and in turn, the stability of the nation.

The author proposed a solution—isolating oneself from other countries’ trade. Pursuing this course of action would better facilitate adherence to the Graham system. The author theorized that “on a natural system of diet, we

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{101} Nissenbaum, 47.
should require no spices from India; no wines from Portugal, Spain, France or Madeira; none of those multitudinous articles of luxury for which every corner of the globe is rifled.” The global system of trade was seen as the main barrier to a natural diet. The foreign countries mentioned—India, Portugal, Spain, France, and Madeira—were positioned as tempters, encouraging Americans to eat and drink themselves into luxurious ruin. The author also suggested that without the quest for debilitating luxuries, overall global violence would decrease—perhaps due to a decreased amount of stimulating foods and beverages in the average global diet. This new world would theoretically be peaceful and harmonious, but it could only be formed through isolation.

Like Graham, the author yearns for a time before “rivalship” and “sanguinary national disputes.” In recalling the past, he describes an idyllic sort of existence:

In those days, exercise must have been performed in the most natural, easy, and agreeable manner. There were then no artisans confined in narrow apartments, and in constricted positions, with some of their limbs unusually developed, while other were emaciated from inactivity. There were then no mechanical employments which could interfere with a proper development of all the muscular organs. In those days of simplicity, man walked forth into the open air, enjoying the cool breezes and odors wafted from a thousand plants. The land, diversified by valleys and hills, afforded an agreeable variety of movements, in descending the one and surmounting the other. When hungry, he plucked his food from the trees, and, when thirsty drank from the limpid brook.102

The scene he described is pastoral and rural, and is presented as the natural form of existence. The old way of living involved open space, a connection

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102 A Defense of the Graham System of Living, 182.
with one’s surrounding environment, and free access to pure food and water. The modern day was characterized as crowded, mechanical, and urban. Given that cities were indeed rapidly increasing in size around this time, it must have seemed as if the entire country was being crammed into this small, urban space. The move to modernity was presented as a civilizational dystopia. In this terrifying modernity, human physiology is altered, due to increased mechanism and urban apartment living. This was a marked contrast from the days of old, in which humanity could frolic about the hills and valleys of the countryside, with the spatial freedom to move wherever and however they pleased.

In this Eden-like existence, delicious, pure food and water were there for the taking, whenever desired. Of course, in Graham’s current time, fruit still came from trees and water from brooks. However, in this case, “modern” was presented as equivalent to “urban.” Therefore, it was likely that the author, writing from his modern-day, urban locale, rarely saw such fruit trees and brooks. Instead, urban dwellers may have only seen the technological and mechanical interventions that allowed the fresh, rural fruit and water to easily reach the city. But while it is unclear as to what time period the author was referencing, it does seem most likely that he has conjured up such Arcadian visions from a rose-tinted view of an imagined past.

Bread as a Civilizing Tool, as seen in A Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking

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103 Despite the fact that an overwhelming majority of Americans still lived in rural areas.
Graham’s *A Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking* illustrates the concept of bread as a force for a healthy and engaged citizenry. Graham wrote his *Treatise* at a deeply transitional time for American agriculture. These changes were especially profound in the wheat crop of New England. Chapter 1 discusses the changing role of the New England farm, of new, cheaper sources of grain, and of fear of poisonous, adulterated flour. It was in this time that Graham’s *A Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking* emerged.

In his *Treatise*, Graham discussed the “Material of Bread,” and revealed the best locations and methods for growing wheat. Graham noted vaguely that the best American wheat is produced in the “southern, and western, and middle portions of the United States,” along with the “northern and eastern parts of New England.”\(^\text{104}\) However, a prime location was not enough, as the soil still required proper fertilization. Graham claimed that the quality of the fertilizer used upon the soil could be determined merely by the scent of the wheat, and theorized that the effects of poor soil upon the finished bread product, and subsequently the eater’s health, were quite profound.

According to Graham, the finest bread product satisfied three essential criteria. First, the bread must be made of whole wheat. Second, the bread must have been made recently. However, Graham did not mean that the bread must be freshly baked, for he claimed bread was most wholesome if it sat out for a full day after baking. Third, the wheat that made up the bread must have been grown upon a “pure virgin soil.”\(^\text{105}\) Given the discussion of

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\(^{104}\) A Treatise on Bread, and Bread-Making, 33.
\(^{105}\) Ibid., 34.
agriculture in Chapter 1, Graham was likely referring to soil that had not been overworked. However, the use of the term “virgin soil” is notable, evoking the idea of unexplored spaces, where none have ventured before, awaiting the arrival of those who can unlock its true potential. Unsurprisingly, this term is most frequently utilized in discussions of Western expansion by the United States. Of course, this term obscures the substantial numbers of Native Americans that were violently removed in order to make this fiction of “virgin soil” a reality. Given that A Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking was published in 1837, readers would have likely recognized the allusion to the United States’ imperialist project.

The allusion was carried further by Graham’s next assertion, claiming that good bread, meaning bread meeting all three of the criteria mentioned above, could most often be found in the “comfortable loghouses in our western country.” The allegory thus moved from alluding to Western expansion to explicitly referencing Western settlement within these “loghouses.”106 Graham’s use of imagery is compelling. Enjoying a warm loaf of freshly baked bread inside a cozy log cabin certainly sounds appealing, and suggests that the bread itself powered Western settlement.

Graham also deeply concerned himself with who exactly was producing bread. Throughout A Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking, he frequently referred to the “public bakers,” who evidently could not be trusted to supply the bread for cities and large towns. While Graham first reassured the reader

106 Ibid.
that he did not intend to insult or degrade any bakers, and he believed they were “as honest and worthy a class of men as any in society,” he spent the next few pages essentially contradicting his own assessment. Graham argued that “public bakers...who serve the public more for the sake of securing their own emolument than for the public good, have always had recourse to various expedients in order to increase the lucrativeness of their business.” Graham claimed that in order to make the bread as appealing as possible and to maintain their profit margins, bakers adulterated their bread with substances like “alum, sulphate of zinc, sub-carbonate of magnesia, sub-carbonate of ammonia, sulphate of copper...flour of beans, peas, and potatoes—and even chalk, pipe clay, and plaster of Paris.” Graham backed up this claim by referencing the court case mentioned in Chapter 1 concerning the thirteen bakers in Brussels.

Through this story, Graham implied that any baker, at any time, could surreptitiously place harmful ingredients into food, and consumers would be none the wiser. The fact that Graham referred to the bakers as a “class of men” is significant. He implied to readers that, despite all his weak reassurances, there was a defined group of individuals who would seek to do them harm. But even when bakers abstained from using injurious substances, their products were still harmful to consumers. Graham claimed that bakery bread was frequently made from cheaper, lower-quality flour, or from spoiled flour mixed with a small portion of higher-quality flour. Graham claimed that

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107 Ibid., 44.
the method of manufacturing bread was harmful to consumers as well, though he did not offer specifics of this dangerous methodology.

Overall, Graham claimed that the most wholesome of breads could only be made within one’s “own domestic threshold.” Furthermore, the only individuals who could make said wholesome bread were those whose “skill and care [were] exercised more with a view to secure our health and happiness, than their own pecuniary interest.” All these factors revealed a fear and suspicion of unknown or undesirable individuals preparing one’s food. Evidently, only those who had a profound emotional connection to the potential eater would be able to successfully make a truly wholesome loaf. Crafting a loaf for profit was thus seen as an inherently suspicious act. When referring to one’s “own domestic threshold,” it delineated that bread was not suitable as a product for public sale, and that breadmaking was meant to be a more personal, emotional project. It implied that an individual who made perfectly wholesome bread for their family might not be able to accomplish the task for another, rendering all outside the family unit worthy of suspicion.

To summarize, in Graham’s eyes, the act of making bread had to be rooted in the deeply profound emotions of love and care. Obviously, commercial bakers could not accomplish this, so they utilized alternative substances to make the bread attractive. But instead, the adulterations turned the bread illegitimate. Thus, the only location where truly wholesome bread could be found was in one’s personal home. In a section entitled *Who Should Make Bread?* Graham further illuminated his thoughts on the subject.
Graham again reiterated the need for an emotional connection to the breadmaking process. This connection went beyond the basic rules and recipes related to bread-making. At its root, bread required “a judgment [that] could] only result from a care and attention and experience which [were] the offspring of that moral sensibility which duly appreciates the importance of the quality of the bread, in relation to the happiness and welfare of those that consume it.”\textsuperscript{108} Again, by this definition, the public bakers were unable to make truly wholesome bread. Domestic servants, too, were deemed incapable of this significant task, again reflecting a fear of unknown individuals preparing one’s food. Graham named the wife and mother as the only figure who can truly assume this gargantuan responsibility. Graham states:

She who loves her husband and her children as woman ought to love, and who rightly perceives the relations between the dietetic habits and physical and moral condition of her loved ones, and justly appreciates the importance of good bread to their physical and moral welfare,—she alone it is who will...prompt the action...essential to the attainment of that maturity of judgment and skillfulness of operation which are the indispensable attributes of a perfect bread-maker...no one can feel so deep and delicate an interest for their husbands’ and children’s happiness as [women] do, so no one can be so proper a person to prepare for them that portion of their aliment which requires a degree of care and attention that can only spring from the lively affections and solicitude of a wife and mother.\textsuperscript{109}

The ability to make bread was narrowed down from those who are emotionally connected to the eater—the family—to one specific individual—the mother. Husbands, sons, and even daughters were excluded, or perhaps exempt from the practice. Due solely to her status as a woman (implied to

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 105-106.
also be a wife or mother), she was also understood to be an emotional, affectionate, and caring being. By this definition, she was the only family member qualified to make bread.

Graham also made it clear that this duty is not new. He nostalgically yearned “back thirty or forty years to those blessed days of New England’s prosperity and happiness.” In these days long past, mothers all diligently performed their duty—hand-crafting their naturally sweet and rich bread for their family. Graham thus linked the prosperity and happiness of the region with the women’s practice of making bread. However, this link carried the implication that if the region is lacking prosperity and happiness, the women are to blame. Regardless, the continual importance of bread was emphasized.

Graham backed up his claims with specific examples. In this case, these examples came from one of Graham’s female acquaintances. A Mrs. S. Mrs. S had many domestic servants, who were able to make a wholesome loaf of bread. But Mrs. S always made her family’s bread herself, for “that [was] a duty [she trusted] no other person to do for [her]...[for] they [could not] feel for my husband and my children as [she did], and therefore they [could not] feel that interest which [she did] in always having such bread as [her] husband and [her] children will love and enjoy.” Of course, it must be noted that Mrs. S’ story fit Graham’s recommendations perfectly, to an almost amusing extent. The overall result was to essentially socially pressure women into adhering to Graham’s philosophy.

\[110\] Ibid., 119.
The woman’s love for her family, as demonstrated through the lens of baking bread, gave her a specified role in society. Good, wholesome bread was defined by Graham as a civilizing, moralizing element that would enable the eater to effectively participate in their duties to society. Therefore, women were given the distinct responsibility and duty of molding her family into moral, civic-minded individuals. However, this responsibility did come with a considerable amount of pressure. The mother was the sole individual whose ability to satisfactorily express love for her family could make or break her family’s health, civic engagement, and overall well-being. Given the connection between diet and national power, the diet fed to America’s citizenry would inform the country’s performance on the world stage. The health of the nation, as well as the health of the individual, were equally the responsibility of the mother, providing at root another reason to keep women behind the kitchen stoves.

The Colonialist Creation Myth, as seen in *Lectures to Young Men on Chastity*

Additionally, some of Graham’s stories and claims can be interpreted as a diet-based call for culinary imperialism. In *Lectures to Young Men on Chastity*, Graham’s controversial speech on the evils of masturbation and sexual thoughts, Graham tells a perplexing story regarding the HMS Bounty. Evidently lifted from Harper’s Family Library, it is meant to provide an example of correctly raising children. As Graham tells it, the crew of the British ship *Bounty* mutinied, leaving behind the Captain and a few of his men adrift in a boat. The mutineers eventually landed in Tahiti. Some married indigenous women, and they stayed there for some time. Eventually, the
mutineers, their indigenous wives, as well as some other indigenous individuals, left for a new home. Upon arriving at Pitcairn’s Island, fighting broke out between the British and Indigenous men, and all adults were killed, except one. This man renamed himself John Adams and raised the nineteen children the mutineers had fathered as his own. Of course, Adams and his children’s manner of living adheres remarkably well the Graham’s recommendations. They lived off of yams, plantains, taro root, bananas, and apples, and thus have little need to slaughter animals—adhering to a fruit and vegetable diet. They constructed their bed of palm leaves and native cloths—sleeping on a hard bed. They made their clothes out of the paper mulberry tree—dressing simply and comfortably. Somehow, doctors were able to examine the children, finding them in superior health. The children’s health and superior development was thoroughly attributed to Adams’ leadership. In sum “their simple habits of living, and their native modesty, assisted by the precepts of religion and modesty instilled into their young minds by Adams had hitherto preserved these interesting people from every kind of debauchery.”

This story can be viewed as essentially a fantastical Grahamite colonialist version of a creation myth. The name John Adams is inescapably linked with the founding of America, and upon Pitcairn’s Island, with John Adams as the sole adult survivor, Adams took upon the biblical role of Adam. On the island, Adams implemented Graham’s teachings, and created

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111 A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, 40.
112 Ibid, 41.
Graham’s idealized version of child rearing, resulting in perfect children. In doing so, Adams taught these indigenous children the “correct” way of living and saved them from a life of sin. Adams’ success in what Graham sees as an original state of nature, involuntarily adhering to the Graham system of diet, proved to the reader that humans could indeed live comfortably and virtuously without modern conveniences. Furthermore, Graham unified the American system of Government with the Graham system of diet, demonstrating that they were both the most natural ways of living. Yet, when read in conjunction with the many stories told in Lectures on Science of the Human Life, Graham does appear to be sanctioning “White Man’s Burden” style imperialist endeavors overseas. Many similar examples can be found in Lectures on the Science of Human Life, which will be discussed below.

The Problem of Non-American Food, as seen in Lectures on the Science of Human Life

In 1839, Sylvester Graham published his Lectures on the Science of Human Life. This massive tome contained fourteen lectures, in which he addressed a variety of topics, from the composition of the nervous system, and the ideal food for man, to the importance of sleep. In the beginning of the text Graham addressed the reader directly, as he likely did the audience at his lectures, and stated that: “these Lectures will afford the unprofessional reader a fund of curious and useful information in relation to the organization of his frame, the laws by which it is governed, and the several causes which tend to derange the regularity of its functions, which he would find it difficult to
obtain from any other source.” In only the fourth page, Graham identified his ideal reader—one who was curious about their body, but with little professional medical knowledge. This lack of knowledge was not an impediment, as Graham also indicated that the contents of his Lectures on...Human Life, as they could not be obtained “from any other source,” were not based in medical practice.

In Chapter Fourteen, Graham described the typical foods of various peoples and cultures, and evaluated their diets by how closely they adhere to the Graham system. Graham paid special attention to India, and critiqued the country’s dietary traditions. Indians, according to Graham, primarily consumed vegetable food. One might think that this diet would be to Graham’s liking, but he identified some significant issues. For one, Graham claims that Indians “eagerly consume whatever alimentary substance they are able to obtain.” This action opened up the diet to possibly incorporate meat or other taboo substances, and implied a lack of self-control that, in the context of the Graham diet, endangered one’s health. Graham also noted that all their food was heavily seasoned with curry powder, which was made up of a number of different spices. Furthermore, the Indian diet contained a number of stimulating substances prohibited by the Graham diet, like opium, tobacco, and alcohol. Evidently, these elements, in conjunction with the curry powder, counteracted any benefits of the vegetarian diet. Graham’s concern over these dietary practices took a distressing turn. A few paragraphs later, he

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114 Ibid., 404.
called for the “the indolent, inactive, miserable-looking Hindoo [sic]” to essentially be forcibly removed from his home and placed into the army, where they would be taught to live in the correct, Grahamite way. This paternalistic system of control would teach the correct type and quantity of food, and discourage the use of traditional substances deemed stimulating.

The benefits afforded by this change would be dramatic. As Graham noted, one’s “appearance would be so much improved in every respect, that he would look as if he belonged to another race of men... and the people could be...awakened to a spirit of enterprise and a consciousness of freedom and independence, and roused to the pursuit of the rational and proper objects and enjoyments of life.”¹¹⁵ Evidently, with better food, Indians would become entrepreneurial and achieve middle-class status, practicing the republican political virtue that was an attribute of the ideal Grahamite. Graham’s writings identify the ideal Grahamite as Christian, middle class, and entrepreneurial. The mention of freedom and independence imply that being American may be an ideal quality as well. It can therefore be extrapolated that another quality of the ideal Grahamite is whiteness. Graham’s food-based missionary work not only proposes to change personality and character, but physical appearance as well—to transform an individual into the ideal Grahamite in literally mind, body, and soul. It is also suggested that Indians would be grateful and happy for this change.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 406.
Of additional interest to Graham was the Indian system of government and society. Graham claimed that the totality of Indian society kept its people weak, lazy, and unintelligent. As stated, “They have nothing to...develop the character of the statesman nor the intellect of the philosopher or the scholar. The love of gain and the desire of wealth and the social distinctions of life...are in India all smothered and subdued.”116 Graham noted a similar phenomenon in Burma,117 calling its government as “despotic and oppressive as any on the globe.”118 According to Graham, the Burmese were heavily taxed on all their possessions, and their king and his officers were known to unjustly seize money and valuable items from the populace. These actions discouraged the people of Burma from seeking more than they explicitly needed to live, which Graham considers akin to an “animal existence.”119 This was evidently common to all cultures across the Asian continent.120 Graham criticized those who, unlike many of his adherents, did not aspire to the middle-class lifestyle. But he also criticized the Indian and Burmese systems of government, which did not promote a desire for upward mobility among its people. At the time, both India and Burma were controlled in some capacity by the British. The references to a “despotic” government and unjust systems of taxation recall the American Revolution, and perhaps subtly insult the British monarchy, America’s former adversary. By stealing from the people and not promoting

116 Ibid., 402-3.
117 Now known as Myanmar.
118 Ibid., 407.
119 But while the lack of entrepreneurial spirit made Indians lazy, Burmese were still strong and agile. Graham never explains why this is so.
120 Ibid., 464.
the best for its citizens, the monarchy had proven itself to be an inferior form of government. In this way, food and diet were again linked with national power, in order to bolster pride in American democracy.

**Conclusion**

Graham’s concept of Eastern society could be summed up as such: a society whose food traditions include spiced foods give rise to people who are despotic, indolent, brutal, and lazy. Obviously, these conceptions are deeply racist. But those qualities might also be associated with slave-holding states as well. Graham’s call for an invading army in India demonstrates his belief that diet informs political organization. Graham’s writing intimates that the United States might follow in the footsteps of India and Burma, unless Americans eat the correct, Grahamite food. Although presented through a prejudicial lens, Graham presents instructions for the formation of a strong, democratic republic.

As seen in *Lectures on Bread and Breadmaking*, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, *A Defense of the Graham System of Living*, and *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, the Graham diet has notably xenophobic undertones. Although problematic, these texts indicate that Graham saw eating “right” as the key to a free, democratic society. This concept was likely perceived by many of the diet’s more radical adherents, which included Angelina and Sarah Grimké, and Theodore Weld. The Grimké-Weld’s use of the Graham diet turned the theoretical applications of the Graham diet into concrete actions.
Chapter 3

A Peculiar Mode of Living: The Grimké-Welds and Diet

To its devoted adherents, the Graham diet could not only bring about improved health, but a renewed sense of mental and moral clarity. As Graham wrote in Lectures on the Science of Human Life, “Flesh-meat, by augmenting the carnal influences on the intellectual and moral powers, always increases the tendency of our understanding...to arrive at erroneous conclusions on all questions of right and wrong...The moral sense tells us to be right, but the understanding only can determine what is right.” Graham’s bold claim illuminates a common idea regarding vegetarians’ perception of meat eating—that it clouds judgement and increases capacity for violence, thus preventing individuals from acting in a truly moral fashion. For this reason, many vegetarians believed that slavery had no chance of being abolished in America until everyone understood that eating meat was morally wrong. Although vegetarians had little thought for animal rights at the time, consumption of flesh was seen as an inherently violent act in itself. Thus, vegetarianism and the Graham diet were linked to the latest reform movements, especially abolitionism.

Some of the most well-known adherents of the Graham diet were members of the Grimké-Weld family. Consisting of Angelina Emily Grimké, her sister Sarah Moore Grimké, and her husband Theodore Dwight Weld, they were all individually distinguished abolitionists. This chapter will begin with

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biographical sketches of Sarah, Angelina, and Theodore, tracing their backgrounds as well as their respective anti-slavery arguments. Then, the Grimké-Welds’ relationship to food will be discussed, within the context of their backgrounds and belief system. As discussed in Chapter 2, Graham saw a connection between dietary choice and political organization. The Grimké-Welds seized upon this connection, and adopted the Graham diet themselves. Angelina Grimké, Sarah Grimké, and Theodore Weld saw diet as the key to a democratic, free society.

The Youth of Angelina and Sarah Grimké

Sarah and Angelina Grimké had uncommon backgrounds for anti-slavery activists. They were born in Charleston to an old Southern family, in which “slavery was as fundamental as fine homes, sea air, and fashionable dress.”

The Grimké family lived on a large plantation estate, which was kept running by a large contingent of enslaved people. Sarah, born on November 26, 1792, was Angelina’s elder by thirteen years. After Angelina was born on February 20, 1805, Sarah requested to become Angelina’s godmother. While this request was certainly unusual, it allowed Sarah to relieve her mother of some of the difficulties that came with raising fourteen children.

As she grew older, Sarah struggled to find her place in the world. Unlike her other sisters, she preferred academic study with her older brother Thomas, and she decided that she wanted to become a lawyer, like her father.

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Of course, it was not proper for a woman to enter such a profession, as all the authority figures in Sarah’s life told her. Upon realizing this unfortunate fact, Sarah entered society at sixteen. This did little to solve her restlessness. Reflecting upon this time, she wrote, “Often during this period have I returned home, sick of the frivolous beings I had been with, mortified at my own folly, and weary of the ball-room and its gilded toys. Night after night...my soul has been disturbed by the query ‘Where are the talents committed to thy charge?’” But by the age of twenty-four, Sarah still had not found a husband, and was rapidly approaching the status of old maid. There is no indication that Sarah was especially eager to find a husband. Instead, she converted to the Presbyterian faith. But this new belief system did not give her a sense of belonging. To make matters worse, she was becoming aware of the extent to which her anti-slavery beliefs were anomalous within her community. She did not understand how her neighbors could justify acting immorally towards their slaves, when they were devoted readers of the Bible.

Sarah found Southerners’ moral inconsistencies regarding slavery to be troublingly common, and she decided she needed to make an even more radical change. In 1821, she moved to Philadelphia and joined the Society of Friends. After a year and a half of observation, she officially announced her desire to become a Quaker and she was accepted in May of 1823. Angelina too felt limited by Southern Society. Like Sarah, Angelina entered the Presbyterian Church. However, she soon realized that the liberality that she

once found so compelling only extended towards other white Christians. Inspired by Sarah’s conversion, Angelina began visiting the small, local Quaker meeting house, which caused the Presbyterians to expel her from the church in 1829. She was now fully conscious of the injustice of slavery, but unlike Sarah, she attempted to convince her friends and remaining members of the Grimké household of the error of their ways.\textsuperscript{124} Her failed efforts only served to deepen the perceived divide between herself and South Carolina society. After a year of vain attempts, Angelina understood she could not convince her family and friends to give up slavery. In 1829, she also left South Carolina for Philadelphia, never to return.

**The Grimkés’ Anti-Slavery Argument**

In Charleston, slavery was a standard part of life. There are numerous examples of the youthful Angelina and Sarah’s exposure to the brutality of slavery. These experiences certainly shaped their disgust at the practice and encouraged them to take small actions. Sarah secretly taught her personal slave to read, and Angelina resolved to never own one herself.\textsuperscript{125,126} In her personal diary, Angelina wrote, “O who could paint the horrors of slavery & yet so hard is the natural heart that I am continually told that their situation is very good much better than that of their owners, how strange that any one should believe such an absurdity.”\textsuperscript{127} Angelina and Sarah’s anti-slavery

\textsuperscript{124} Berkin, 13.  
\textsuperscript{127} Walking by Faith, 37.
sentiments were based in both conceptions of Christian morality, as well as hermeneutical analyses gleaned from scripture. However, the Grimkés’ argument went beyond the brutality directed at slaves. The sin of slavery threatened the entire moral fabric of the United States. As slaves were kept illiterate, they could not read the bible, risking their souls. By preventing their slaves’ souls from reaching salvation, the slave owners would be damned as well. Northerners were guilty too, as they had “naturally become callous” to the plight of the slaves. Their objection to slavery also stemmed from their assessment of slavery’s effects on women. Women of all races were victims of slavery, due to the “licentiousness of the Master and his sons.” Explicit references to the sexual indecencies that slavery encouraged were often used to specifically recruit women to the anti-slavery cause. Carol Lasser calls this strategy Voyeuristic Abolition, which was one aspect of the “explosion of writings that promoted a new, incendiary immediatist movement” In addition to the Grimké sisters, William Ellery Channing, Lydia Marie Child, George Bourne, and Theodore Weld all utilized these “highly sexualized

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128 However, their opponents would have been able to utilize a different set of bible quotes to justify their own positions.
129 According to Larry Ceplair, the editor of *The Public Years of Angelina and Sarah Grimké*, Sarah requested that the letters she sent from 1821-1836 be destroyed. She may have requested that later letters be destroyed as well, or merely wrote less. In the end, Angelina left more of a written record than Sarah did, and so scholars have a better understanding of her perspective. I am assuming that Angelina and Sarah shared the same objections to slavery.
formulations” to encourage action.\textsuperscript{133} In his influential work, \textit{American Slavery as It Is}, he writes:

\begin{quote}
[A female slave’s owner] proposed a criminal intercourse with her. She would not comply. He left her and sent for the overseer and told him to have her flogged...He then told her...he intended to whip her till she should yield. The girl, seeing that her case was hopeless...dreading a repetition, gave herself up to be the victim of his brutal lusts.\textsuperscript{134}
\end{quote}

Such descriptions were incredibly graphic for the time, thus intended to shock the sensibilities of presumably Northern audiences and promote empathy for enslaved peoples. Of course, enslaved women were the primary victims of slave-owners’ sexual misconduct, and as Angelina wrote, only a wicked, un-Christian law would “require woman to enslave, to degrade and to brutalize woman” [emphasis in the original].\textsuperscript{135} But additionally, the masters’ wives were hurt and humiliated by their husband’s escapades. To the Grimkés, slavery had the potential to undermine both the institute of marriage and the family unit. Therefore, it was a system that hurt all it touched, albeit in unequal amounts.

An interesting perspective that Ronald G. Walters raises is the possibility of physiological consequences for the slave-owner’s actions. The leading theory of bodily function, to which Sylvester Graham adhered, linked sexual excess with bodily and mental degradation. Most abolitionists, while acknowledging the slave owners’ immorality, did not make the connection to the medical theories of the time. While published well after the Grimkés and

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\textsuperscript{133} Lasser, 91.  \\
\textsuperscript{134} Theodore Dwight Weld, \textit{American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of Thousand Witnesses} (New York, 1839), 11-15.  \\
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Appeal To the Christian Women of the South}, 25.
\end{flushright}
Theodore Weld left the public eye, abolitionist Louisa Barker’s work, *Influence of Slavery upon the White Population*, theorized that the owners’ improprieties led to intergenerational weakness and feeblemindedness, and posited that this was a form of vengeance.\(^{136}\)

**Angelina’s Exploration of the Quaker Movement**

In 1830, Angelina was officially accepted into the Society of Friends. However, the Society of Friends did not provide the ideological freedom that Sarah and Angelina had hoped for. Reading materials beyond Quaker literature were discouraged. The Society of Friend’s refusal to permit Sarah to become a minister tempered her initial zeal for Quaker worship. Furthermore, slavery, the issue that drove Sarah and Angelina out of the South, was rarely discussed within her Quaker community.

Certainly, opposition to slavery is the most well-known aspect of the Quaker belief system. However, the Grimkés had joined a more conservative branch of the Society of Friends, known as the Orthodox branch. While the Orthodox Quakers did oppose slavery, they were also against public advocacy and activism against slavery. The Orthodox branch was the result of a schism that began in the early 1820s. As certain Quakers gained more wealth and social prestige, a rift arose between those who lived in the city, versus those who lived in the country. While the “country” Quakers, led by Elias Hicks, maintained their belief that the concept of inner light was central to the faith,

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the Orthodox “city” Quakers, adopted “British innovations designed to make Quakers resemble other Protestant denominations, including advocating creeds like the divinity and atonement of Jesus, and practices like the hiring of paid ministers.”\(^\text{137}\) The Orthodox faction took control of the major leadership positions, and split with the “Hicksite” faction in 1827. To avoid further conflict, the Orthodox meetings banned open discussion of controversial topics—slavery included.\(^\text{138}\) Sarah had joined the Society of Friends by this time and was close with many Orthodox Quakers. Although Sarah was not particularly involved or invested in this “Great Schism,” she followed her Orthodox friends, and Angelina later joined the same Meeting. This is especially fascinating, given that the Hicksites were significantly involved in anti-slavery world, openly affiliating with the American Anti-Slavery Society and the Free Produce movement. In fact, Elias Hicks had a hand in founding the Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania, which was one factor that led to the Great Schism.\(^\text{139}\) But while Quakers like Lucretia Mott were fighting alongside William Lloyd Garrison for immediate abolition, Angelina Grimké was not even allowed to discuss the matter in Meeting.

Frustrated, Angelina began reading abolitionist journals like *The Emancipator* and *The Liberator* and attending anti-slavery lectures and meetings. Most notably, she joined the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. In her diary, Angelina wrote, “I had long regarded this cause as


\(^{138}\) Ibid.

\(^{139}\) Lerner, 90.
utterly hopeless, but since I had examined Anti-Slavery principles I find them so full of the power of Truth that I am confident not many years will roll over before the horrible traffic in human beings will be destroyed.” Reflecting on this formative time, both Angelina and Sarah named George Thompson’s Philadelphia lecture on March 3rd, 1835 as the seminal event that cemented their commitment to the cause. However, as Gerda Lerner notes, Sarah did not even attend the lecture. This statement from the Grimkés was likely more symbolic than anything else, for George Thompson’s lectures provided the impetus for the Grimkés’ subsequent fame and abolitionist career.

George Thompson was an abolitionist from England. Known for his extreme positions, even within the anti-slavery community, he was a close friend of William Lloyd Garrison. Perhaps encouraged by Garrison, the New England Anti-Slavery League invited Thompson to lecture in America, and a lecture tour across the Northeast was planned. This selection of speaker was fairly controversial, to say the least. As Duncan Rice writes, “Convinced abolitionists were to welcome him eagerly, while the pro-slavery response was violent reaction to the whole idea of his interference from abroad.” Riots followed Thompson wherever he went.

A Thompson lecture was scheduled in Boston, and on August 22nd, 1835, Garrison wrote an Appeal to his readers, encouraging the citizens of Boston to keep an open mind regarding Thompson’s lectures. Angelina was

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140 Walking by Faith, 209.
142 Rice, 21.
incredibly moved by Garrison’s words, and responded in a letter, asserting her commitment to the abolitionist cause. She wrote:

My mind has been especially turned towards those, who are standing in the fore front of the battle...If persecution is the means which God has ordained for the accomplishment of this great end, Emancipation; then...I feel as if I could say, LET IT COME; for it is my deep, solemn, deliberate conviction, that this is a cause worth dying for. I say so, from what I have seen, and heard, and known, in a land of slavery, where rests the darkness of Egypt, and where is found the sin of Sodom. Yes! LET IT COME—let us suffer, rather than insurrections should arise.¹⁴³

Recognizing the power in her words, Garrison published the letter in *The Liberator* without Angelina’s knowledge. Evidently, others were similarly touched by Angelina’s evocative statement, as her letter was widely reproduced in periodicals throughout the country. As a result, Angelina was effectively considered an active radical abolitionist.¹⁴⁴

However, this small action that began Angelina’s career in public activism was not without consequence. The Quaker faith frowned upon public displays of activism. Many elder Friends asked Angelina to retract the letter, and even Sarah agreed, which was incredibly difficult for Angelina. While Angelina was dismayed by the numerous negative reactions by those closest to her, she had no regrets, writing,

I believe [sic] that letter was pend under the right feeling, in the spirit of prayer...I believed I had some right, that tho’ condemned by human judges I was acquitted by him whom I believe [sic] qualify’d [sic] me to will it, and I felt willing to bear all, if it was only made instrument of good.¹⁴⁵

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¹⁴⁴ Berkin, 28.
¹⁴⁵ Walking by Faith, 211-13.
This private diary entry reveals much of Angelina Grimké’s character—that she believed her actions and activism were all drawn from her by God, that she was a divine instrument, tasked with redeeming all the sinners she encountered.\footnote{Wilbanks, xxiv.} The knowledge that she was doing divinely sanctioned work gave her the strength to endure the criticism directed her way.

In Angelina’s letter to Garrison, she referenced her status as a former Southerner. This was to be the most common method of grounding her argument. Angelina utilized her first-hand knowledge as a southerner to justify her anti-slavery positions. Beyond her eloquence in both writing and speech, the Grimkés’ Southern background provided the abolitionist movement with a new perspective—and a new method of convincing Southerners of the error of their ways. Leveraging both this unique position and her newfound fame, Angelina wrote and published an Appeal to the Christian Women of the South that next year, in 1836. Addressing her former neighbors as “respected friends,” she began her Appeal with a Bible-based argument against slavery, and then dissected the Southern Slave Codes.

Angelina then spoke directly to her intended audience:

I appeal to you, my friends, as mothers; Are you willing to enslave your children? You start back with horror and indignation...But why, if slavery is no wrong to those upon whom it is imposed?... Do you not perceive that as soon as this golden rule of action is applied to yourselves that you involuntarily shrink from the test; as soon as your actions are weighed in this balance of the sanctuary that you are found wanting?...Look too, at Christ's example...Can you for a moment imagine the...Saviour, a slaveholder? do you not shudder at this thought as much as at that of his being a warrior? But why, if slavery is not sinful?\footnote{Appeal to Christian Women of the South, 13-14.}
Angelina specifically encouraged the women of the South, on the basis of their womanhood, to fight against slavery. From Angelina’s perspective, their female status makes them especially suited to combat slavery. She references the strength of biblical women like Esther, Huldah, and Miriam, and assures her readers that, like those famous women of the bible, they too have the capacity to create change. The *Appeal* encouraged women to take concrete actions to protest slavery, from discussing the topic with family and friends and collecting petitions, to actually freeing the family slaves. However, few southern women would have been able to read the *Appeal*. It, along with most other abolitionist literature, would have been destroyed before it could have reached the hands of any readers. In Charleston, Angelina’s mother was informed that Angelina would be immediately arrested if she ever returned.\(^{148}\)

**Theodore Weld’s Background**

Capitalizing on the popularity of the *Appeal*, the Female Anti-Slavery Society invited both Angelina and Sarah to give a number of “parlor talks.” In order to prepare for this new task, the Grimkés were invited to the Agent’s Convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society, where they would be properly trained. For Sarah, the intellectual stimulation afforded by the convention cemented her commitment to the cause. The agents-in-training were prepared by Theodore Weld, a well-known abolitionist at the time.

\(^{148}\) Berkin, 33.
Theodore Weld was born in 1803, to a family of Congregational Ministers. He was raised in Connecticut, and was expected to join the ministry, just like his father and grandfather. At fifteen, Theodore left home to attend Andover Academy, in preparation for college and future religious career. For two years, he threw himself into his studies, so much so that his eyesight began to fail him. As a result, Theodore was forced to drop out. Although he was still young, Theodore embarked on a lecture tour, in which he spoke about mnemonics, in which a teacher had instructed him, to improve his faulty memory. This two-year voyage gave Weld the chance to hone his oratorical skills, for which he would become well known much later in life.

As a student at Hamilton College in 1826, Weld attended a talk by the revivalist preacher Charles Finney. Finney, like many other revivalists at the time, railed against the current church establishment, calling them the “devil’s helpers.” Weld, whose family was a part of said establishment, was angered by Finney’s exuberance, responding, “my father was a real minister of the Gospel…and an honor to the profession. [Finney] is not a minister, and I will never acknowledge him as such.” But evidently, Finney’s passion for the revivalist movement affected Theodore profoundly, for it was only a few short days until Weld, along with his closest friend Charles Stuart, devoted himself to Finney’s cause. “In the Finney revival and its millennial promise to covert the world…Theodore had found a cause…certainly great enough to satisfy his

own heroic sense of self.”  

He again set off as an itinerant lecturer, now preaching Finney’s message to the sinners of New York State. While on the road, Weld expanded his lectures to focus on temperance as well, and became one of the more powerful temperance lecturers in the area. But unlike the more well-known temperance movement of the 1920s that demanded government regulation, Weld encouraged listeners to find the urge to stop drinking within themselves.

Having returned to his original goal of entering the ministry, Theodore entered the Oneida Institute, a ministerial school that combined religious instruction with manual labor. This combination of two different sorts of exertions was quite appealing to Theodore. Sylvester Graham, as well as many other physicians and reformers of the day, believed that overworking one area of the body led to debility in all other areas. Given Theodore’s difficulties at Andover, this theory must have made a lot of sense. As Theodore saw it, the Oneida Institute’s student-laborer program was the key to dismantling the old-fashioned church hierarchy system, and even reforming all of society’s ills. It filled idle hours that could be used for sinful purposes. Physical exertion was also believed to drive away negative feelings like irritability and jealousy, and preserve the ideal state of the bodily system. But most importantly, it dissolved the lines between yeoman and elite. Manual labor allowed students to earn money while completing their education, and gave privileged students

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151 Ibid., 57.
the ability to better understand the conditions that faced the laboring classes. Given his passion for manual labor, Weld became an agent for Louis Tappan’s new Society for the Promotion of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions, which encouraged educational institutions to utilize manual labor as part of their curriculum.

In examining these principles of manual labor, Theodore found his opinion turning against slavery. In his later years, Theodore recounted his change of heart occurring when he was a teenager, after witnessing classmates bullying a free black classmate. But as Johnathan Earle noted, radical and instant transformations of that sort were unlikely.\textsuperscript{152} Theodore could not condone the system of slavery, or even the Colonization movement, as long as he believed in the values that he gleaned from Charles Finney’s religious teachings and his experiences with Manual Labor—the rejection of both institutional hierarchy and superiority of certain men to others.

Many of Weld’s friends, like Charles Stewart and Louis Tappan, had become active in the anti-slavery community, and began sending him literature. But it took a trip to Western Reserve College, where he spoke on manual labor and temperance, to fully change his mind. There is no record of what exactly occurred there. But when Weld left, he rejected the Colonization doctrine\textsuperscript{153}, which he had previously championed, and became a full supporter

\textsuperscript{152} Earle, 61.
\textsuperscript{153} Advocates of Colonization supported emancipation, as long as those freed immediately left America and resettled in Africa.
of immediate emancipation—for only this method acknowledged humanity of enslaved peoples.

Weld eagerly brought this new insight to Lane Theological Seminary, where he again prepared to enter the ministry. He, along with his fellow abolitionist friends, organized what would later be known as the Lane Debates. However, the Lane Debates were more intended to be a conversion effort than an actual debate. The two debate questions reflected this: “Ought the people of the Slaveholding States to abolish Slavery immediately? Are the doctrines, tendencies, and measures of the American Colonization Society, and the influence of its principal supporters, such as render it worthy of the patronage of the Christian public?” After eighteen days of vigorous debate, all was concluded exactly as Weld had hoped—with the final verdict on the two main debate questions being yes and no, respectively. The new, anti-slavery sentiment was funneled into an Anti-Slavery society, as well as significant outreach to the free black community in Cincinnati. As Stuart Henry wrote, “[Lane students] associated so openly and sufficiently with the Blacks of the city, as to bring down upon themselves accusations infinitely graver in the eyes of conservative Cincinnatians than that of merely prosecuting the abolitionist cause.”

It was not only the citizens of Cincinnati that disapproved of the anti-slavery activities at Lane. Certain faculty members requested that the anti-

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154 Abzug, 90.
slavery society refrain from socially mingling with free blacks. Then, the
school trustees recommended that all extracurricular societies be banned, that
students be prevented from making public announcements at meals or social
gatherings without prior approval, and that Professor John Morgan, the only
anti-slavery supporter on the faculty, be dismissed. Most egregiously, they
suggested prohibiting any private conversation on slavery. While the official
regulation omitted this item, it was replaced with a rule that gave Lane
trustees the power to expel students at its discretion.

Outraged, Weld, along with 79 other students, left the 100-person
Seminary, decimating the school. The newly built Oberlin Collegiate Institute
welcomed them, and many of the former “Lane Rebels” became part of
Oberlin’s inaugural class, helping found their Theological Department.

Theodore Weld did not follow the Lane Rebels to Oberlin. Instead, he left the
prospect of the ministry behind, and became an anti-slavery agent in the
West, focusing on Ohio and Pennsylvania. Weld faced numerous violent
mobs, which he took to mean that he was doing God’s work.

**Theodore Weld and the Grimké Sisters Meet**

After two years of such efforts, the Anti-Slavery Society gave Theodore
the responsibility of recruiting new agents. This new effort was especially
important, as abolitionists were moving away from pamphlet production and
distribution, and towards writing and delivering compelling speeches.

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156 Abzug, 118.
157 Henry, 5.
158 Barbara Brown Zikmund. "The Legacy of This Place: Oberlin, Ohio." *Journal of
Theodore gathered the new agents, which included Angelina and Sarah Grimké, at Convention in New York. From November 15th to December 2nd, 1836, the delegates worked ten-hour days in order to become the effective agents of the Anti-Slavery Society. Robert Abzug refers to the convention as Weld’s “swan song,” for by its end he had permanently lost his voice.159

After the convention, Sarah wrote her own version of the Appeal, another piece directed towards Southerners. In 1836, the American Anti-Slavery Society published her Epistle to the Clergy of the Southern States. Like Angelina’s Appeal, as well as most other anti-slavery tracts published at that time, Sarah utilizes a bible-based argument to justify her stance. The crux of Sarah’s argument is that slavery forces Africans to be treated as “things,” which directly contradicts God’s word. She writes:

[God] did not say let man be, but ‘Let us make man in OUR IMAGE, after our likeness…’ Here is written in characters of fire continually blazing before the eyes of every man who holds his fellow man in bondage...Here is marked a distinction which can never be effaced between a man and a thing, and we are fighting against God’s unchangeable decree by depriving this rational and immortal being of those inalienable rights which have been conferred upon him...Slavery has disrobed him of royalty, put on him the collar and the chain, and trampled the image of God in the dust.

Sarah then continues by disputing commonly held declarations in favor of slavery. She utilizes extensive textual analysis to prove false the assertions that Abraham held slaves, and that Africans were the “divinely condemned” descendants of Ham and notes the hypocrisy of Americans who “With one hand...clasp the cross of Christ, and with the other grasp the neck of the

159 Abzug, 152.
down-trodden slave.” She closes by accusing the Church of complicity in the sin of slavery and encourages clergy members to speak out against the system.

In December of 1836, the Grimkés began their “parlor talks.” Taking place in the home of a leading abolitionist, these lectures discussed slavery with female audiences in an explicitly female-coded space. But as the Grimkés’ notoriety increased, audiences could no longer fit inside the parlors. Furthermore, fascinated men were attempting to get into the lecture room, which was quite scandalous at the time. They then launched a speaking tour of New England as quasi-agents for the American Anti-Slavery Society, which caused them to become a lightning rod for controversy. This was partially due to their status as outspoken women in the public eye, as well as their abolitionist beliefs. Often, individuals refused to publicize or host their lectures.

**The Grimké-Welds’ Exploration of the Free Produce Movement**

To Sarah and Angelina Grimké, the cause of abolition required more than merely educating citizens through publishing works and giving lectures. These were certainly rare and risky actions at the time. Many women who had previously performed public activism, like the Scottish radical Francis Wright, were constantly mocked and attacked in the press. However, the abolitionist cause required similar bold action.

Abolitionism called for a complete lifestyle change. In an open letter published in *The Friend of Man*, an anti-slavery paper based in Central New
York, the Grimkés outlined the various ways in which Northerners could “overthrow the great Prison House of the South.”\footnote{Cornell University Library, “About,” The Friend of Man, January 25, 2018, http://fom.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/cornell-fom?a=p&p=about&e=-------en-20--1--txt-txin--Grimke-----} They wrote,

Let northern men who go to the South to make their fortunes, see to it that those fortunes are not made out of the unrequited toil of the slave... Let northern manufacturers refuse to purchase cotton... Let the grocer refuse to buy the rice and sugar of the south... Let the merchant refuse to receive the articles manufactured of slave grown cotton, and let the consumer refuse to purchase either the rice, sugar or cotton articles, to produce which has cost the slave his unpaid labor, his tears and his blood.\footnote{Theodore Weld to Lewis Tappan, 9 March 1836, in Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké 1822–1844, vol. 1 270-1.}

All those involved in the supply chain of slave-produced cotton, sugar, and rice are equally to blame for the perpetuation of slavery. To justify their argument, the Grimkés reference the relatively recent American Revolution, drawing a direct line from the Colonies’ response to the Stamp Act to their current anti-slavery work. They argue that the earlier generations viewed refusing England’s tax upon the colonies as a moral duty, and that there was a similar moral duty to refuse products made with slave-labor. While abolitionist lectures frequently drew violent, jeering crowds, perhaps scaring away those who would join the cause, the Grimkés assert that abolitionism is a noble cause, part of a long chain of American patriotism.

Grimkés’ writings on abolition revealed a unique view of activism. To them, it was not possible to take up abolition in spare time. The Grimkés’ conception of abolition required constant monitoring and self-critique, which would ensure that all of one’s actions would support the ultimate goal.
stringent belief system cannot escape comparison to the Graham system.

Graham’s theory of health instructed that literally everything, from one’s food, clothes, hygiene, construction of one’s home, to even thoughts and sexual practices, contributed equally to overall health. Therefore, all these elements must be constantly monitored and kept in check. Abolitionists, as described by Angelina and Sarah Grimké in their editorial, must be equally vigilant.

These sentiments led Angelina and Sarah Grimké, as well as Theodore Weld, to champion the free produce movement. A movement that dated back to the 1790s, it urged adherents to boycott products, like cotton, sugar, molasses, tobacco, and rice, that were made with slave labor. It was hoped that if enough individuals did this, slavery would become economically unsustainable, and would be abolished. While fairly unpopular in its inception, free produce gained minor prominence in the 1820s, and the first American society devoted to the promotion of free produce was founded in January 1827. Historian Carol Faulkner roots free produce’s newfound popularity within the market revolution. By the 1820s, goods like cloth were more frequently produced in factories, as opposed to being spun within the home. Sometimes, this meant that cloth was produced with slave labor.

Angelina Grimké, in a letter to family friend Lewis Tappan, reflects this sentiment. In discussing the ethics of purchasing and using slave-made calico cloth, she writes,

I do not use the products of Slave labor because, if I did, instead of obeying the Apostolic injunctions...I should become a partaker in the slaveholders’ sin and should be holding fellowship with their works of darkness...Think ye that slaveholders are sinners above all men that dwell in our country? I tell you nay, but except ye also repent, ye manufacturers...and ye merchants and storekeepers...and ye consumers who...give back into the hands of the Oppressors that unrighteous gain.\textsuperscript{164}

With her reference to the “Apostolic injunctions,” Grimké indicates that the main brunt of her moral objections is derived from religion—and indeed, the main supporters of free produce were Quaker abolitionists who sought to absolve themselves of the shame associated with commercially sustaining the slave trade. In promotional literature for free produce, phrases evoking cleanliness and purity were often used to illustrate the goals of the boycott. For example, the announcement of the first annual meeting of the American Free Produce Association encourages attendants to “wash their hands” of their complicity in the slave trade.\textsuperscript{165} This choice perhaps focused the movement’s motivation more on offsetting individualized guilt than on actually freeing slaves.\textsuperscript{166} Of course, it is interesting to note the similarity in tone between the free produce movement’s focus on cleanliness and purity of soul and the Graham diet’s focus on cleanliness and purity of food and body.

Of course, in many cases it was impossible to adhere to the proscriptions of the free produce movement. In remote areas of the country, slave-produced products were often the only option available. As Angelina

\textsuperscript{166} Faulkner, 298-9.
Grimké relayed to Elizabeth Pease, the well-known British abolitionist, these logistical difficulties made free produce both expensive and difficult to purchase. But the difficulty was still present in larger cities. Thomas Farrington De Voe’s 1867 volume, The Market Assistant compiles a variety of knowledge necessary for household management and categorizes the variety of foods sold at a typical Northeastern public market. Although it was published after the Civil War had concluded, the volume is useful in noting the provenance of goods most important to a household.

With the increase of the population of [New York City] a larger and wider area of land for the supply of [vegetables] became requisite...the Southern States, Bermuda Islands, etc., send their early supplies to our markets—not only vegetables, but fruits, fish, nuts, etc....From Charleston, Norfolk, Savannah, and the Bermudas, tomatoes, potatoes, peas, cabbage, onions, strawberries, cherries, are brought...Early in the spring from the South, and still later from the north, many rare vegetables...are brought to market by the facilities afforded by the railcars and steamboats.

At least in New York City, and likely many other major cities as well, the sheer quantity of food necessary to feed a major city would have required middlemen to engage with a slavery-dependent supply chain. As De Voe mentions, market products also required engaging with new technologies like the railroad, which would have further disguised the slave labor required for production. As discussed in Chapter 1, the impersonal markets that led to a fear of foods adulterated without consumers’ knowledge helped popularize the Graham diet—and similar motivations drove individuals to the free produce

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167 Angelina G. Weld to Elizabeth Pease, 784.  
movement. As Michelle Branch evocatively wrote, “The...life of cities celebrated tastes highly dependent upon subjugating peoples in distant places.”

Furthermore, major figures within the abolitionist cause like William Lloyd Garrison, who had once supported free produce, now rejected the validity of the cause, claiming that that slaveholders were motivated by the desire to dominate other men, and therefore could not be prevented by economic means. While many of free produce’s biggest advocates referred to it as the ultimate means of defeating slavery, Garrison saw it as a distraction from larger issues. The next generation of abolitionists seem to have shared this assessment, as did Garrison’s son, Wendell Phillips Garrison, when he wrote, "The Abolitionists proper, we repeat, although always stigmatized as impracticable, never mounted this hobby as if the battle-horse of victory." The rejection from a major percentage of the abolitionist base must have been incredibly demoralizing.

In many cases, the free produce alternative was simply unattractive or unappealing. The main philosophy surrounding the free produce movement was that of asceticism and self-denial. This tactic may have been compelling for certain Quakers who championed the movement. Certainly, the Grimké-Welds were supporters of simple living, with Weld writing to Angelina Grimké

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170 Faulkner, 394.
171 Nuermberger, 103.
that they “must be an example...and a reproof to this lust of the eye
generation.” However, many others felt the opposite, which may have
prevented free produce from accumulating the audience necessary to make a
substantial difference. Free labor products were often distributed through
special “free produce stores,” the earliest of which was opened in 1826 in
Baltimore. Yet, while moral quality could be assured, actual product quality
could not. As the granddaughter of Lucretia Mott reflected, "Free sugar was
not always as free from other taints as from that of slavery; and free calicoes
could seldom be called handsome, even by the most enthusiastic; free
umbrellas were hideous to look upon, and free candies, an abomination.”
Once these various difficulties had revealed themselves, interest in free
produce declined.

While the Graham diet inspired a number of companion organizations
and publications to facilitate conversion, the free produce movement did no
such thing. Certainly, one cannot discount the possibility that a recipe for a
cake using, perhaps, maple sugar instead of slave-produced sugar was passed
around via word of mouth. However, there is no print record of any “tips and
tricks” that would make the transition to a free produce diet any easier. While
recipes and publications would be certainly helpful in revealing the dietary
implications of the free produce diet, the lack of such evidence is equally
indicative. As mentioned above, the great majority (though certainly not all)

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174 Glickman, 890-1.
175 Ibid., 900.
of free produce adherents were Quaker. As a result, the concept of free produce was based on a philosophy of abstemiousness. This philosophy was consistent with other aspects of Quaker life—to use a well-known example, Quakers objected to vanities as miniscule as a colored hair ribbon.

Accordingly, the adoption of free produce was meant to be a struggle. One adhered to its principles in order to absolve themselves of the sin of slavery. But recipes or instruction manuals would allow an adherent to bypass the struggle that was such an integral part of the free produce experience. Providing or seeking out a workaround solution might cheapen the experience.\textsuperscript{176} The Graham literature assured adherents that in a short time they would find joy and dietary pleasure in the coarsely ground Graham bread. But the literature surrounding the free produce movement did no such thing. This reasoning, of course, lends itself to another explanation as to why free produce failed. Free products were of notoriously poor quality, as described above. However, fashioning free cotton into stylish, ready-made products, as some free produce shopkeepers attempted, did not make them any more attractive. A fashionable, free produce cotton dress, while perhaps attracting a small number of Northern customers for the cut or style, would certainly have alienated the Quaker base of the free produce movement.

Free produce definitely did not succeed at its intended goal. There is little indication that the Southern establishment ever viewed free produce as a

\textsuperscript{176} Fascinatingly, this directly contrasts with the actions of the revolutionaries to which Sarah and Angelina Grimké refer in their open letter in Friend of Man. These “fathers and mothers” created substitutes for British cloth, tea, and other products, and free produce activists were evidently inspired by their motivations, but not their approach.
significant economic threat or valuable indicator of consumer preferences. However, the movement’s importance as a large-scale effort of early consumer activism cannot be denied. Lawrence Glickman suggests that this oft forgotten movement, as opposed to the Progressive Era fight for consumer protection laws, gave rise to our modern conception of consumer activism. Free produce activists understood and communicated the entrenched economic connections between the North and the South that made Northerners just as complicit as Southerners were in slavery. Furthermore, they elucidated a strong moral impetus to oppose slavery in all its forms.

Angelina Grimké, Sarah Grimké, and Theodore Weld become the Grimké-Welds

The Grimké sisters were now publishing works that broached the topic of feminism. Angelina wrote *Letters to Catherine Beecher*, a response to Beecher’s *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with reference to the Duty of American Females*, which claimed that women were only meant to assert influence within domestic areas. Sarah published *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, which claimed that although men have caused women to suffer in “every age and country,” women were indeed equal to men in all things—they were both made in the image of God, they were equally heroic as men, they were equally as intelligent as men. These radical publications only caused the number of their detractors to increase. Yet, Angelina Grimké did

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177 Glickman, 889.
something even more controversial—when two men interrupted her lecture to
assert that she was incorrect about the nature of slavery, she agreed to
publicly debate the issue. This marked the first public debate between a man
and a woman, and while, according to all reports, Angelina soundly won the
debate, it was scandalizing. In 1837, a contingent of ministers from
Massachusetts issued a Pastoral Letter, which expressed their disapproval of
the Grimké sisters’ lecturing and writings, and encouraged all places of
worship to close their doors to the sisters. Even some of the Grimkés’
abolitionist allies had their doubts, and they asked the sisters to cease public
discussion of women’s rights. These male abolitionists saw women’s rights
and abolition as two distinct issues, and believed it was impossible for the
Grimkés to advocate for both. While this position is now understood as
perplexing and illogical, it was a common opinion held by male abolitionists
at the time. Theodore Weld wrote,

You can do ten times as much on the subject of slavery as Mrs. Child or
Mrs. Chapman. Why? Not because your powers are superior to theirs,
but because you are southerners...Now this peculiar advantage you lose
the moment you take on another subject...Now you two are the ONLY
FEMALES in the free states who combine all these facilities for anti-
slavery effort: 1. Are southerners. 2. Have been slaveholders. 3. For a
long time most widely known by the eminence of friends. 4. Speaking
and writing power and practice. 5. Ultra Abolitionists. 6. Acquaintance
with the whole subject, argumentative, historical, legal, and biblical.
Now what unspeakable responsibilities rest on you—on YOU!¹⁷⁹

Again, the Grimkés’ unique background was referenced, but this time to
convince them not to stray from the path.

¹⁷⁹ Theodore Weld to Sarah and Angelina Grimké, 15 August 1837, in Letters of Theodore
That letter marked the beginning of an extensive chain of correspondence between Angelina and Theodore. In the time since they had first met at the Agents Convention, Weld had written letters addressed to both Angelina and Sarah, and they considered him a friend and confidant. But after the Pastoral Letter was published, Weld’s letters became critical and patronizing. Over four months, Angelina and Theodore angrily debated women’s rights and the AASS’ treatment of the Grimkés. When the Grimké sisters claimed that the AASS was not treating them as full members and agents of the society, Weld responded, “It is so utterly unaccountable. I stare at it, so ludicrous I could laugh loud, and finally it argues such a STATE OF MIND in you that I could cry like a child.”

But in November of 1837 Weld apologized for his harsh criticisms. He and Angelina began their letters anew, with none of the previously held tensions. On February 8th, 1838 he sent Angelina a letter marked PRIVATE, containing a confession of love. Angelina sent the same to Theodore, and a wedding was planned. Their wedding, on May 15th, 1838, was “as much an abolitionist and feminist statement as it was a commitment between a woman and a man.” The wedding invitations were decorated with an illustration of a slave in chains, and the guest list included many African American friends, including Betsy Dawson, a former slave of the Grimké family. The cake was

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183 Berkin, 68.
baked by a free black man, who operated a bakery that only utilized free sugar. The ceremony constituted a rejection of religious institutions. Angelina’s marriage to Theodore was a violation of Quaker law, as was Sarah’s mere presence, which all but guaranteed their expulsion from the Society of Friends. There was no officiating minister, and instead twelve guests were asked to act as witnesses to legalize the marriage. But especially radical was their decision to sign a prenuptial agreement that allowed Angelina to retain control of all money and property in her name.

After many intense years of lecturing, writing, and subsequent criticism, Angelina was ready for a rest. In a letter to Theodore, she wrote, “O! how I should rejoice if the Master should say ‘It is enough.’ It is an increasing trial to me and most gladly would I retire from public view and sink down into sweet obscurity.” Sarah joined the couple in “obscurity” as well. As a woman of 45, Sarah had no hope of marriage. She therefore had very few options other than joining Angelina and Theodore’s household. But such a decision was expected, given the bond that Sarah and Angelina had shared since youth. The three of them moved to a farm in Belleville, New Jersey.

The Grimké-Welds and Food

Together, they attempted to prove wrong all those who claimed the Grimké sisters were incapable of married or domestic life. However, they did encounter difficulties. Until now, they had no experience in caring for a home; as children, their parents had expected that slaves would be managing the household. They were heavily dependent upon *The Younger Housekeeper; or*
Thoughts on Food and Cookery, by William Alcott, a well-known health reformer. The Grimké-Weld household was equally enamored of another health reformer, Sylvester Graham. Theodore Weld had adopted the Graham system in 1836, and Angelina Grimké had done the same in 1837.\textsuperscript{184} Grahamism gave meaning to Weld’s life in a way that few organized practices ever could. As Robert Abzug wrote, “Grahamism...gave to Weld visions of godly order that did not revolve around the actions of some fallible, human churchly institution...Grahamism put into an everyday routine the means by which Theodore might concentrate on realizing bodily salvation.”\textsuperscript{185}

Furthermore, the Grimké-Welds were not the only abolitionists who favored the Graham system. William Lloyd Garrison, Gerrit Smith, Charles Finney, Horace Greeley, the Alcott brothers, and the Tappan brothers were all adherents or general supporters of Grahamism.

Melanie DuPuis utilizes the example of Rochester, New York to explain the convergence of these radical ideas. She writes,

These men lectured and preached to the denizens of Rochester to replace predestination with the idea that humans could perfect themselves and their world (Finney); create a perfected way of life through abstention from the evils of meat, spices, and sex, especially “the solitary vice” (Graham); examine one’s inner self to escape the conformities and achieve a change of heart (Emerson); or rid the nation of the sin of slavery (Garrison).\textsuperscript{186}

The major radical issues of the day, concerning religion and spirituality, food, temperance, slavery, and the like, converged and reflected


\textsuperscript{185} Abzug, 157-8.

each other. The city of Rochester does indeed provide the perfect example, as
it became a hotbed for radical temperance, abolitionist, and suffragist work.  

While the dietary practices of peoples past are generally of interest in
the current day, they can be difficult to determine with certainty. Often, the
content of one’s daily meals was not considered significant enough to merit
recording. However, there are a number of letters in which Theodore Weld
describes his diet to Angelina Grimké, as well as his friend, Charles Stewart.
Given that his reported diet changes little over a number of years, the letters
provide a fair estimation of Theodore Weld’s average diet. Graham bread is, of
course, a significant part of his diet, notably “always upon the table.”

In keeping with Graham’s recommendations, a small hand mill is utilized to
grind grain at home whenever required. Weld highly recommends various
corn-based products, like cornbread, corn cakes, corn johnny cakes, and corn
mush, and consumes them frequently. His dinner is often composed of both
Irish and sweet potatoes, turnips, spinach, almonds, raisins, and figs.

Beans, vegetable soup, homminy, stewed applesauce, raw apples, parsnips,
cabbage, and rice were also frequently consumed. However, Weld avoided
sweet dishes such as puddings, dessert pies, and cakes, but he did enjoy cocoa,
which “[was] cheaper than tea or coffee, and [was] not a poison.”

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187 Ibid., 43.
189 Ibid.
Like most adherents of the Graham system, Weld did not follow the diet as exactly prescribed in the literature. Two discouraged items that Weld often consumed were milk and eggs. Milk was a special favorite, to the point that Weld, for a period, had a jug of milk set by his plate at every meal. Weld later ended this habit, however, for fear that the milk made him bilious. Eggs were also frequently used “in puddings, pumpkin and squash pies, and in eggplant, mince or hash.”\(^{191}\) Regarding pie, it is important to note that the crust, was likely very different from the buttery, crisp shell that we use today. \(\textit{Nature’s Own Book},\) a cookbook written by the Graham boardinghouse-owner Asenath Nicholson, provides a recipe for piecrust that involves “sifting coarse flour, and taking hot, mealy potatoes, and rubbing them as you would butter; then [taking] pearlash, and sour milk, or water, and wet it, rolling the crust if you please in fine flour.”\(^{192}\) She claims that such a crust is “equally as palatable” to butter crusts, but only to those with “unadulterated taste.” This recipe is especially fascinating, given the rarity of Grahamite substitutions for “debilitating” food.

In a letter to her friend Jane Smith, Angelina described her efforts cooking “rice and asparagus, potatoes, mush, and Indian bread” for the family.\(^{193}\) A special dinner might have included items like “graham bread and rice, fruits, jams, radishes, milk, cheese and Graham wafers, graham cake, raisins, and almonds.”\(^{194}\)

\(^{191}\) Ibid.
\(^{193}\) Birney, 246.
\(^{194}\) Abzug, 209-210.
The letters indicate that to the Grimké-Welds, Graham bread was more than just sustenance. Graham bread could be used as a medicine, or at least contribute some amount to good health. In a letter to Weld, Angelina writes, “Little Thomas has been at the point of death, but was better when I called yesterday. He begged me to send him more of our bread. So Betsy has made him a nice little loaf of Graham today.”\footnote{Angelina G. Weld to Theodore Weld, February 20, 1842, Weld-Grimké Family Papers, Box 4 Folder 9, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.} In a letter to Angelina Grimké, the Unitarian preacher William Ellery Channing recommended a loaf of Graham bread to the seriously ill Theodore Weld. Channing claimed that Graham bread was “worth more than all medicines for this end.”\footnote{William Ellery Channing to Angelina G. Weld, May 6 1839, in Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké 1822–1844, vol. 2, 761.} This, however, was not a belief limited to the radicals of the North East. In a letter from Albin Kendall Putnam,\footnote{Who would later become a well-known Episcopal priest.} addressed to his parents Silas and Dorothy Putnam, he informs them as to how he is settling into life on his own at Dartmouth University. He relays to his parents his efforts to eat healthfully, and specifically notes how Graham bread will assist him in that effort. He writes, “The bread which I made is the Graham bread, and I think it will be much more healthy than the common bread. It is used by nearly all the students that board themselves, and in some of the clubs.”\footnote{Putnam, Albin Kendall ALS to Silas & Dorothy A. Putnam, March 21 1835, Albin Kendall Putnam papers 1821 August 29-1850 June, Box 1, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.} While the Grimké-Welds, William Ellery Channing, or Albin Kendall Putman may not have had an explicit distrust of doctors and medicine, their use of bread as a means to
improve health reflects the general Grahamite rejection of the medical establishment. However, this proved to be harmful for the Grimké-Weld household, when Angelina attempted to feed her first child, Charles Stuart Weld, according to Grahamite principles. Given the Grahamite focus on small meals and general lack of protein permitted in the diet, this action nearly led to baby Charles’ death, and from that moment, Graham’s grip on the household was loosened.

It is clear that the Grimké-Weld family saw the Graham diet as more than merely a method of eating. It was a way of being that facilitated the way they chose to live their life. They expected all those who lived under their roof or shared their table to join in as well, which was fairly challenging in certain cases. For example, Theodore Weld struggled to find a housekeeper who would be willing to adhere to the family’s special requirements. As he wrote to Louis Tappan on the subject,

> That the person...should be healthy, acquainted with the kind of housework and simple cookery is **important**. But that she be a woman of good principles, good natured, kind hearted in all respects...is **indispensable**...Our peculiar mode of living...may be to her quite an objection. She should know fully, we never have in our house meat, butter, tea, or coffee, we never provide them for any, nor allow them to by cooked in the house or used. To consume with tobacco and intoxicating drink our objections of course **vastly** stronger than to the articles of named.\(^{199}\)

To Theodore Weld, and presumably to Angelina and Sarah Grimké as well, adherence to the Graham system of living was equally as important as being a kind and moral individual. Perhaps, to the Grimké-Welds, the

\(^{199}\) Theodore Weld to Lewis Tappan, Mar. 4, 1844, Weld-Grimké Family Papers, Box 4, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.
Grahamite diet facilitated morality. Sarah Grimké writes that the tenets of the Graham diet allow her to become “more apostolic, more Christ like in [her] way of living.”  

Sarah explained this statement, “I have heard graham lecture & read Alcott Young housekeeper & am a convert to the system, both because I believe it is most conducive to health & because it is such an emancipation of women from the toils of the kitchen & saves precious time for purposes of more importance than eating & drinking.” The Graham system, therefore, facilitated Sarah’s commitment to her abolitionist and feminist activism, which she believed to be her calling.

Conclusion

There is rarely a single reason why one adopts a diet. Furthermore, rarely do people explain the roots of such seemingly mundane decisions for the historical record. However, there is often some deeper motivation. Given the difficulty of adhering to restrictive diets like the Graham diet, individuals likely did not adopt such diets casually. It is doubtful that the Grimké-Welds selected the Graham diet for solely economic reasons. While the prohibition of meat caused the diet to be considerably cheaper than the average diet, they were similarly committed to the expensive Free Produce movement. It is clear that the Grimké-Welds viewed economics as secondary to the justness of the cause,. They certainly did not restrict their diet in the name of environmentalism or animal rights, for there were no such movements at that time.

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201 Ibid.
point in time. Although many of their fellow abolitionists were Grahamites or Grahamite-friendly, the Grimké-Welds were certainly not compelled to follow the crowd. Being a Grahamite was not a particularly popular choice, and many were mocked in the media of the day.202 Furthermore, the diet called for many inconvenient practices, like grinding one’s own wheat—which the Grimké-Welds did.

Rather, all of the Grimké-Welds’ food choices fed into a larger lifestyle designed to fit within their personal political framework. Both the Free Produce movement and the Graham diet were political in that they resisted engaging with the standard production methods of the time. While Grimké-Welds’ diet did not by any means adhere perfectly to the Graham literature, the underlying motivations were the same. Both diets had an underlying ethical code that stressed control over food production, and the importance of understanding where one’s food comes from. There was a similar concern regarding the origins of items they consumed, as well as the power of markets to obscure these origins. Overall, both theories were grounded in ideas of “right living;” that a certain amount of morality and virtue regarding one’s food would result in improved health.

Coda

Upon moving to Belleville, Theodore Weld wrote and published *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* in 1839.

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Angelina and Sarah played a pivotal role in researching and transcribing the slaves' testimony. After 4 years of private life, Theodore Weld re-entered public life as an anti-slavery lobbyist in Washington DC, while Angelina and Sarah remained at home. Angelina found domestic life very difficult. She struggled with poor health, and briefly subscribed to the apocalyptic visions of William Miller, who believed that the world would end in 1844. After an intense period of lecturing, Weld again lost his voice, and returned home to Belleville to farm. The three of them moved to Raritan Bay Union, a utopian community and school in New York. They then established a different school, called Eagleswood. However, all efforts proved unprofitable. When the Civil War broke out, Angelina and Sarah reentered public life, supporting the war effort and women’s issues. Sarah died in 1873, and Angelina died in 1879. Theodore died in 1895, surviving to see the publication of the first of many biographies of the Grimké sisters—Catherine Birney’s *The Grimké Sisters: Sarah and Angelina Grimké, the First American Women Advocates of Abolition and Woman’s Rights.*
Conclusion

Eat Food. Not too Much. Mostly Plants: Michael Pollan as a Neo-Grahamite

This topic is personal to me. As an individual with numerous allergies, I must adhere to an unusual diet. My allergens are artificial colors, flavors, and preservatives; thus my personal diet falls under the umbrella of that great, amorphous term—all natural. As a result, my diet often encompasses the moral movements for ethically made and locally grown food. I wholeheartedly support these efforts, but fundamentally, I adhere to my diet in order to live safely. Stemming from my own experiences, I have always been curious as to how others configure their own diets for personal or political reasons. My exploration of the Graham diet and the Grimké-Welds’ experiences with food have thus been fascinating from both a personal and academic standpoint.

When I tell others about my thesis topic, and describe the Graham diet, I most often receive this reaction: “Wow, his diet is just like veganism!” If you, the reader, have gleaned anything from this work, you will hopefully understand that this statement is not quite true. While Graham certainly did not condone meat, dairy, or eggs, this was due to his theories regarding how the human body would react to these items, rather than the theories of animal rights that underpin today’s modern veganism. But these observers are not entirely incorrect, for Graham’s writings often sound as if they had been lifted from Civil Eats or Mother Jones.
In the early 19th century, Sylvester Graham railed against the current trajectory of America’s food system. In our time, that role has been taken up by figures like food writer Mark Bittman, or chef and restauranteur Alice Waters. However, most famous is Michael Pollan, a journalist with “rock-star status,” and author of *The Omnivore’s Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, and its follow up, *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto*.°° Pollan marks a positive correlation between dietary choice and ethics. In other words, the food that is most nourishing for us is also most nourishing for the larger world. In keeping with this philosophy, he lays out his famous proscription: “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.”

Pollan’s words sound familiar. Much of Pollan’s recommendations seem to come directly from *A Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking*, or *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*. Pollan discusses how the modern innovations of nutrition science and food marketing are rapidly changing what Americans eat—and for the worse. He writes, “Over the last several decades, mom lost much of her authority over the dinner menu, ceding it to scientists and food marketers (often an unhealthy alliance of the two) and, to a lesser extent, to the government.” Pollan’s longing for mom’s wholesome, home-cooked meals directly mirrors Graham’s pining for the “comfortable log cabins” in which mother lovingly baked bread for the family. Furthermore, his

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°°° See reviews published on michaelpollan.com
distrust of nutritionists, scientists, and marketers easily stand in for the medical professionals of Graham’s day. By “shaking the hand that feeds [him],” Pollan seeks to reclaim control of the food supply chain, the same one that the railroads and urbanization had disrupted in the 1830s.205 His recommendation to “regard non-traditional foods with skepticism” may not have been in reference to the foods that originated outside America, but the immediate distrust of new and unfamiliar foodstuffs, especially those which arose through technological innovation, fits well within the Grahamite philosophy. Furthermore, Pollan suggests that cooking and eating represents “our most profound engagement with the natural world,” and that we have a duty to engage with our world in a respectful manner—rejecting the industrialized foods that cause anguish in humans, animals, and plants.206 The ethics and taste of food hold equal importance to Pollan. However, he advises that engaging with, and then consciously rejecting the unsavory aspects of the industrialized system, in favor of the slow, old ways, makes food taste even better. Thus, the Grimké-Welds are also reflected.

Obviously, Michael Pollan is no reincarnated Sylvester Graham. They have their significant differences, most notably in the realm of the environment. Pollan’s writing is undergirded by a strong ecological conscience, while Graham’s philosophy contains no theory of environment. However, their proscriptions, rationale, and ultimate message are remarkably

similar. These observations suggest that Pollan is neither postmodern virtue signaler nor novel food theorist. Indeed, while important, Pollan’s many concerns are not new. He is but one man, part of a long tradition of food criticism, which critiques not on the basis of nutrition and health, but ethics and morality. His books do not mention this, and personally, they likely would have benefitted from a food historian’s perspective. For while we no longer look upon railroads with trepidation, there are always new products and production methods. Factory farming and farm-worker exploitation still threaten the morality of our food system, and technology-centric consumables such as Soylent threaten the very concept of a home-cooked meal.

Graham, the Grimké-Welds, and Pollan package the same message for different time periods, but that does not imply either are insignificant or unworthy of academic study. Graham is unique, in that he created not merely a method of eating, but a unified system of living that combined diet and physiology. In doing so, the Graham system articulates a connection between health of the individual and health of the group, fundamentally linking diet and civilization. Adherents like the Grimké-Welds seized upon this connection, adopting the Graham diet in order to visualize a more equitable world.
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