

Sanika Kulkarni

Professor Buyco

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The Founding Mothers of Women's Rights

In the past, being an American meant seeking opportunities and success from a place that permitted life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Today, being an American also means being able to gain success and happiness by working hard and providing for their families, so that this tradition gets passed on to future generations, regardless of gender. There were several women during the first half of the nineteenth century who attempted to find social and economic liberation to identify themselves as independent individuals. A century later, America saw an empowered women's liberation movement in the 1960s. Sarah Grimke and Margaret Fuller were activists who advocated for women's rights, because they wanted to raise awareness for females who were forced to align with nineteenth century gender stereotypes, through media sources such as novels and letters.

Sarah Grimke was an abolitionist and writer from Charleston, South Carolina born in 1792 followed by her sister, Angelina who was born in 1805. At the time, women were not allowed to receive an education despite their interests, so the Grimke sisters decided to take a stand against society. Together, this dynamic duo took part in the abolitionist movement speaking out against the norms of females. Sarah Grimke was

the less outspoken one out of the two, however she did participate in several crowd speeches, and her legacy has been prominent till present day.

In 1837, Grimke wrote the *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* to her sister Angelina explaining the harsh realities that women face on a daily basis. She compared the life of a slave to the life of a woman, elaborating that women are considered subservient to men just as slaves are to their masters. Grimke was inspired by the *Liberator* newspaper written by William Lloyd Garrison and chose to incorporate the issues of slavery in her letters. Furthermore, Grimke argues that “woman has no political existence” (Grimke Par.1) simply because they are not permitted an education. This allows the men of society to develop an inferiority complex over women. Her novel specified that women must make their places in society as individuals, not by being subordinates to men, and she openly spoke about this in public. Additionally, Grimke subtly criticizes women from wealthy families because these women wanted “equality” but they themselves believed that their place in society was to become a trophy wife. In addition, wealthy females received some form of education, which placed them a step ahead of middle-class females. Therefore, her indicated target audience was working-class females, because they were the only individuals who genuinely struggled with gender inequality and rights to an education.

Margaret Fuller had a relatively different life growing up. Fuller was a feminist from Cambridgeport, Massachusetts born in 1810. She was educated with rigorous intent in her childhood and grew up to become one of most highly regarded intellectuals in the early 1800s. Fuller met Ralph Waldo Emerson, the father of Transcendentalism in

1836, which sparked her interest. Transcendentalism was the idea that individuals should believe in self-freedom to pursue personal growth. For centuries, religion was above rational judgment, but the Transcendentalist movement turned the tables. Briefly after her meeting with Emerson, in 1845 Fuller wrote a novel named *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. This book campaigned for women's suffrage and highlighted Fuller's transition to a transcendentalist philosopher. Margaret Fuller claimed "let every woman, who has once begun to think, examine herself" (Fuller Par. 5). Ultimately, women needed to find their true selves by exploring their fascinations. The deeper meaning of Fuller's argument is that if women are educated, then they are self-sufficient till they find someone to spend their life with. In contrast to Grimke, Fuller passively explains that marriage between two people had become a mutual arrangement, rather than a relationship built with love. If a woman does her part to take care of the household, while a man goes out and works, there is no affection between the two. Fuller encourages that women should be more educated so that both men and women have similar intellectual capabilities. This will create more understanding and love between them. Therefore, once females figure out what they are passionate about, they must seek independence to study further.

After thoroughly analyzing both documents I came to a conclusion. Fuller and Grimke believed that men and women should be deemed equal. Nevertheless, Grimke pointed out religious documents for suppressing women. Both ladies believed that women needed to identify with their own independence. Fuller asserted that women were dependent on men and that their marriages became degraded to the point where

their relationship was loveless. Fuller thought that if women accepted men who weren't the best fit for them, then they would diminish the value of knowing how to love others and the feeling of being loved. Meanwhile, Grimke believes that as long as women are oppressed by the law, then they will continue to suffer intensely. Grimke suggested that when a man and woman get married, they identify as one person, indicating the dominance of men and disappearance of women's identity. Altogether, both females played a huge part in advocating for women's rights. If it weren't for them, we wouldn't have come this far today.

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