

## Margaret Fuller's "Woman in the Nineteenth Century" (1845)

Margaret Fuller was the daughter of a Jeffersonian congressman, a member of the transcendentalist circle, editor of the *Dial*, and (at the time of her death) a reporter for the *Harold Tribune*. During the 1840s, women, especially those involved in the abolitionist movement, began to apply the language of universal human rights and equal liberty to their own condition. Denied the vote, legally subordinate to their husbands, and lacking basic legal protections, these early feminists argued that American women were not enjoying the blessings of American freedom. As you read this excerpt from Margaret Fuller's book, consider her reasons for demanding the same freedoms for women and men.

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We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man. Were this done, and a slight temporary fermentation allowed to subside, we should see crystallizations more pure and of more various beauty. We believe the divine energy would pervade nature to a degree unknown in the history of former ages, and that no discordant collision, but a ravishing harmony of the spheres, would ensue.

Yet, then and only then will mankind be ripe for this, when inward and outward freedom for Woman as much as for Man shall be acknowledged as a right, not yielded as a concession. As the friend of the Negro assumes that one man cannot by right hold another in bondage, so should the friend of Woman assume that Man cannot by right lay even well meant restrictions on Woman. If the Negro be a soul, if the woman be a soul, appareled in flesh, to one Master only are they accountable. There is but one law for souls, and, if there is to be an interpreter of it, he must come not as man, or son of man, but as son of God.

Were thought and feeling once so far elevated that Man should esteem himself the brother and friend, but nowise the lord and tutor, of Woman, - were he really bound with her in equal worship, - arrangements as to function and employment would be of no consequence. What woman needs is not as a woman to act or rule, but as a nature to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded, to unfold such powers as were given her when we left our common home. If fewer talents were given her, yet if allowed the free and full employment of these, so that she may render back to the giver his own with usury, she will not complain; nay, I dare to say she will bless and rejoice in her earthly birthplace, her earthly lot.