



LIBERTY MATTERS

REMEMBER THE LADIES: THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY AMONG THE GENDERS

Women's History Month (formerly Women's History Week) seems a fitting time for us to "Remember the Ladies," as Abigail Adams exhorted her husband, at Liberty Matters. In this month's series, we've invited scholars to reflect on women's fight for gender equality. Over the course of this month, you'll find reflections based in history, politics, and literature, all with an eye toward the role individual liberty and responsibility have played in each account.

FROM MASTER TO FRIEND: ABIGAIL ADAMS AND ANGELICA GRIMKÉ ON TYRANNY, SELF-RESTRAINT, AND POLITICAL PARTNERSHIP

by Elizabeth Amato

In 1917, Carrie Chapman Catt claimed that “woman suffrage is inevitable.” This was a bold claim. The amendment’s passage was less than assured. It would be three more bumpy years, including one failed vote in the Senate, until the 19th Amendment was ratified by nail-biting votes in state legislatures. Securing the right of women to vote had been the life’s work of many women, including Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Anna Howard Shaw—all of whom died before they saw their efforts realized. Ideas may have consequences, but there are no inevitable applications of principle.

Of course, Catt’s “inevitable” was partially rhetorical. It’s a classic move in an open political contest to claim victory before the fact. When the [Declaration of Independence](#) was written, Catt claims, suffrage for

women “became an assured fact.” Americans have unflinchingly held fast to their founding political principles. Wryly, she adds “[h]owever stupidly our country may have evaded the logical application at times.”

“SECURING THE RIGHT OF WOMEN TO VOTE HAD BEEN THE LIFE’S WORK OF MANY WOMEN, INCLUDING SUSAN B. ANTHONY, ELIZABETH CADY STANTON, AND ANNA HOWARD SHAW—ALL OF WHOM DIED BEFORE THEY SAW THEIR EFFORTS REALIZED.”

[Abigail Adams](#) would agree. In late March before the Declaration was written, Abigail tries to impress her husband with that line of logic.

In her famed “[remember the ladies](#)” letter, Abigail is full of eager anticipation. She “long[s] to hear that [John] has declared an independency.” Independence from Great Britain, she keenly sees, is an opportunity to rethink how men and women as members of a free society could relate to each other. A new country would require a “new Code of Laws.” Abigail does not tell us precisely what sort of

laws she'd most like to see. She leaves the matter, as she tells [Mercy Otis Warren](#), that laws should be founded “upon just and Liberal principles.”



Abigail Adams

What Abigail cares a great deal about is giving an account of why the relation between men and women is distorted by the same vice as tyranny. At the bottom of tyranny is the unrestrained passion for one's advantage and pleasure over the rights and good of others. Without laws to protect the rights of women, they remain exposed to capricious rule in the home. The relation between husbands and wives is more appropriate to monarchy than republican government.

The struggle for equality is the struggle of women to claim their share to participate in the common deliberations of the public interest and weal. Not only must the political and civil spheres be enlarged to include women, but men must recognize the limits to their rule. As Abigail Adams and Angelica Grimké argue, men must moderate their claims to rule, and they must consent to be equal citizens.

Reform Begins in the Home

Not prone to subtlety, Abigail likens the current rule of husbands over wives to arbitrary government and playfully threatens to “foment a Rebellion.” Abigail reminds John that “all men would be tyrants if they could.”

Tyranny is not a vice peculiar to kings. The propensity to tyranny—the love of dominion—lies within the human heart. Tyrants seize power without political right, but their lawlessness extends to their souls. Tyranny, as [Socrates](#) observed, attacks the faculty of judgment. From there, immoderate desires overflow any boundary. Tyrants lack self-restraint—seizing political power indicates a certain contempt for limits—and so are ruled by their passions.

The danger of tyranny, however, will not be extinguished by defeating King George III. Free self-government works if citizens cultivate the virtues needful to govern their own passions and desires. Every citizen should be a law unto himself or herself.

As long as arbitrary rule endures in the home, the habits of mind and heart that incline men to tyranny can be cultivated unchecked. Tyranny can't be kept in a box. It has the potential to spill over to other areas of life and, at minimum, be a drag on the public-spirited concern for the common good. Instruction on the virtues is never so effective as seeing them practiced at home.

[John](#)'s response to Abigail is disappointing if predictable. He laughs away her “extraordinary” code of laws. In a poorly conceived effort to smooth things over, he gives some boilerplate flattery that men are the true subjects to women's rule.

Abigail's “trial of the Disinterestedness of his Virtue” proves her point. John is willing to topple tyrants across the Atlantic to his benefit, but not closer to home.

The men of the Second Continental Congress are inconsistent in the application of their principles. Their self-love limits them. What great generosity, Abigail archly observes, the men show to mankind. They've been back-slapping and knuckle-punching each other “proclaiming peace and goodwill” and “emancipating nations” but nothing for the ladies.

In order for men and women to meet as equals in public life, men must, as Abigail entreats John, put aside the “harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend.” There is no place for “masters” among free and equal citizens. Mastery assumes that the master

orders subordinates because he has the most to contribute to the whole (whether the whole be a household or the body politic). More precisely, his contribution is so great and unequal that, in effect, his will dominates the whole. The individuality of all other members is lost or overshadowed. Mastery is useful for determining a single, steady course of action, but it is not particularly complimentary to cultivating the habits of self-government.

Friends, however, rejoice in recognizing the boundaries that set each person apart from another person. Women are free and independent persons. Friendship better preserves the independence and particularity of persons. Abigail insists on the individuality and the importance of her voice—she can “add” something of herself to the whole. Mastery works by subtraction; friendship adds. Friends can construct wholes that are greater than the sum of their parts without losing sight of their individual contribution. Friendship between husbands and wives provides a better model for fostering the characteristics and virtues of a free people.

Angelica Grimké on How to Speak to Tyrants

The Grimké sisters did not intend to become advocates for women’s rights, but they swiftly realized that one tactic to shut down their speech on abolition was to attack them as women. The hardness of heart and narrowness of public concern that Abigail foresaw, the Grimké sisters reaped. Like Abigail, Angelica Grimké saw tyranny at work.

Born in South Carolina, the Grimké sisters were raised on their family’s plantation, which required a large number of enslaved persons to operate. Sarah, the elder sister, motivated by opposition to slavery, converted to Quakerism and moved to Philadelphia. Likewise, Angelica soon converted and joined her sister in Philadelphia. Drawn into the [abolitionist movement](#) by William Lloyd Garrison and Lucretia Mott, the sisters embarked on a speaking tour throughout New England to share their story.



MISS ANGELINA GRIMKÉ

Visiting nearly 100 cities and towns, the Grimké sisters inspired the formation of several anti-slavery societies along the way. Predictably, they encountered opposition for being women speaking in public in front of audiences of men and women (a norm-breaking “no-no”) and speaking on “political” matters (decidedly not ladylike). The more resistance they received, the more their speeches devoted time to establishing their rights as women. Defending the rights of women rattled even more listeners. Some fellow abolitionists suggested they tone down the women’s rights talk so as not to imperil the cause. The Grimké sisters did not.

In her 1838 address to the Massachusetts State Legislature, Angelica Grimké makes clear what is at stake. Women have too great an interest in the country to leave it up to men. If women do not preserve rational argumentation and deliberation as the appropriate means for citizens to engage in political discourse, uglier forms of political influence will worm their way into political life.

Angelica recounts the story of [Esther](#), who sought the preservation of her people by appealing to a tyrant. Angelica emphasizes how Esther, dressed in her most beautiful clothes, plies Ahasuerus with wine and a sumptuous feast. To be clear, Esther’s mode of appeal is a highly calculated decision. Esther, Angelica describes,

had “studied too deeply” Ahasuerus’s character; she knew that “the sympathies of his heart could not be reached, except through the medium of his sensual appetites.” Ahasuerus’s rational faculties are so corrupted that even if he vaguely intuits that Esther is faking, he cannot resist flattery.



Queen Esther

Angelica could hardly have made a more provocative comparison between herself and the men of the state legislature. Like Esther, she is on a “mission of life and love,” but she will not use the same means. She comes plainly dressed to make arguments based on principle. Angelica gives the legislature a choice. Either be like Ahasuerus, a tyrant, who is so governed by his animal appetites that he sets state policy according to flattery of subordinates or be like representatives of a free people who must be persuaded by “loftier sentiments” and by “truths...present[ed] to your understanding and your hearts.”

Uncomfortable as it must have been for the legislators shifting in their chairs to be compared to a classic Old Testament baddie, Angelica’s purpose is to bring into focus the dangers of clinging to lawless power. Liberty requires limits.

Anticipating the old saw that women informally rule men, Angelica pierces through the faux flattery. She exposes it as a monstrous depiction of political rule fit only for tyrants. If it is true that women are the real rulers, then

women’s rule is based on “the baser passions of man” not their intellectual or moral capacities. The relationship between the Ahasuerus and Esther is based on lust and exploitation. Angelica renounces the “dominion of women” as inconsistent with republican government.

Instead, a woman is something “more—she should be a *citizen*” (italics in original). Citizenship acknowledges the moral responsibility of a person to take care for the “public weal” or otherwise to hold “partnership” in the “nation’s guilt and shame.” Women as much as men were responsible for slavery in America. What distinguishes a good regime from a bad one is whether the rulers govern for themselves or for the sake of the ruled. The inequality between men and women has permitted men to rule for their pleasure. Men must restrain their claim to govern for the whole and to see in women persons like themselves with the same rights and corresponding duties in public life. By recognizing women’s equality with men as moral beings and citizens, implicitly, men are restored to being citizens and holding the nation in partnership with women.

The challenge for American women was not to persuade men of the principles of the Declaration. A prior lesson was necessary in which men had to discern their immoderate claims to rule. The only kind of mastery consistent with republican government is self-mastery.

THE WOMAN QUESTION: THE FIGHT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

by Giandomenica Becchio

In her [letter to John Adams, dated March 31, 1776](#), Abigail Adams (1744-1818) wrote:

"Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation."

Adams was reminding her husband, [John Adams](#), as a representative of the new nation supposed to be founded on individual freedom, to remove those formal and substantial obstacles which had traditionally prevented women from entering the public sphere on equal terms with men.

During the 19th century, the battle for equality between the sexes involved so many ladies (and a few men) that that period is known as 'the first wave of feminism.' All of them are worthy to be remembered, but this note will be focused on the contributions of those ladies who specifically demanded access to higher education for girls as the most significant instrument which could provide them economic autonomy. They converged on the idea that economic independence was the most significant way to free women from being materially subjected to their husbands/fathers/brothers. The main consequence of their battle for women's economic independence is that many activists for women's rights started to read, discuss, and write about economic matters and political economy.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689 –1762) was a forerunner of this attitude. She exchanged some letters with James Steuart about his book, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* (1767), by inviting him to admit that if women were allowed to take part in the market the prosperity of their country would rise.



Mary Wollstonecraft (1798)

[Mary Wollstonecraft](#) (1757-1797) opened up the early feminist tradition within British classical liberalism. In her *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* ([1792] 1994), Wollstonecraft replied to [Jean-Jacques Rousseau's](#) *Émile ou De l'éducation* where the French philosopher proposed that a girl's education should aim to make her supportive to her well-educated husband. According to Wollstonecraft, Rousseau's attitude, grounded on the fact that privileged and educated men systematically denied education and autonomy, including economic independence, to women, may be regarded as the major enemy of women's emancipation and of the prosperity of a nation.

Wollstonecraft was against the 'doctrine of separate spheres.' i.e. the traditional complementarity between the stereotype of an emotional, intuitive and tender woman, unable to manage material resources, and the stereotype of a rational, ambitious, and strong man, naturally inclined to materially provide resources for a family as well as to govern a business and a country. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft highlighted the fact that gender norms had constantly and systematically reinforced the doctrine of the separate spheres: for instance, marriage made women completely dependent on their husbands from a financial point of view by reinforcing their subjection.^[1]

In her *Letters on Sympathy*, [Sophie de Grouchy](#) (1764-1822), the translator of [Adam Smith's](#) *Theory of Moral*

[Sentiments](#) into French (1798), described the relevance of the mechanism of sympathy in explaining the development of political and economic institutions by insisting on the fact that sympathy is a common element in individuals' nature regardless of their gender. Hence, women are as good as men at bargaining and trading and their participation in market exchange would increase the wealth of a nation. In the same year and sharing the same attitude, Priscilla Wakefield (1751 –1832) wrote *Reflection on the Present Condition of the Female Sex; with Suggestions for its Improvement* (1798), which was aimed to promote women's education in order to gain financial independence; her pamphlet was explicitly inspired by Adam Smith's notion of [division of labor](#) as the main principle to be applied in a prosperous society.



Harriet Martineau (1834)

[Jane Haldimand Marcet](#) (1769-1858) and [Harriet Martineau](#) (1802-1876) were deeply engaged in popularizing the principles of classical economic liberalism among women, and they both promoted an economic education for girls. In 1816, inspired by her reading of Smith, Marcet published her *Conversations on Political Economy* to educate the ladies about "the science of political economy [that] is intimately connected with the daily occurrences of life, and our ignorance may lead us into serious practical errors." The book was praised by [Ricardo](#), [Malthus](#), and [Macaulay](#), who invited her to

join the Political Economy Club where she was the only female member admitted.^[2]

Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) was committed to an enlargement of economic education with a special emphasis on women. Between 1832 and 1834, she published her *Illustrations of Political Economy* in nine volumes to promote classical liberal principles through an economic narrative. In her book, women, who filled the role of reader of the Illustrations and character within its tales, were depicted as fundamental contributors to the economic process aimed to enrich a country.

[Harriet Hardy Taylor Mill](#) (1807-1858) had a pivotal role in promoting gender equality and economic education for women. She insisted on the importance of married women to earn her own income and she supported women's access to the labor market by insisting that their presence would have broken the male monopoly and increased the general level of competition within society. In her *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851), she demanded: "education in primary and high schools, universities, medical, legal, and theological institutions; *partnership* in the labors and gains, risks and remunerations, of productive industry; and a *coequal share* in the formation and administration of laws--municipal, state, and national--through legislative assemblies, courts, and executive offices" (author's emphasis).



Harriet Taylor Mill

Influenced by Harriet Taylor, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891) wrote *Women and Work* (1857) based on the principle that women and men share the same attitude and motivations which include necessity, self-fulfillment, and greed. She supported gender equal pay and she identified gender educational gap as the most determinant element for job [discrimination](#) and men's monopoly over the most remunerative positions. Bodichon promoted her ideas by opening up her own school for girls and by founding the monthly periodical *English Women Journal* (1858-1864) in order to promote female employment.

In the United States the battle for gender equality in education and in the economy was deeply interconnected with the fight for [abolition](#). The condition of belonging to a double minority (to be a woman and to be a person of color) was determinant for many activists of the time who used to lecture in open debates and to publish in popular magazines. In 1832, Maria W. Stewart (1803-1879) was the first American woman who gave a memorable speech against slavery and chauvinism. In 1851, Sojourner Truth (1797 – 1883) delivered the well-known speech *Ain't I a Woman* to strongly denounce the double discrimination she was facing as a Black woman (Gage 1863). Between 1849 and 1860, Harriet Tubman (1820-1913) whose nickname was Moses, rescued dozens of slaves and constantly worked to provide crucial information in order to help other slaves to make their own escape from Maryland.



Sojourner Truth

In 1833 in Philadelphia, a group of women established the bi-racial Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFAS). The group included Sarah and Angelina Grimké. Sarah Moore Grimké (1792-1873) published a series of letters in the *New England Spectator*, later collected under the title *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* (1837). In her letter to her sister Angelina (1805- 1879), she complained about the restrictions on the “miserably deficient” education imposed by the conservative American society on women, “[who] are taught to regard marriage as the one thing needful, the only avenue to distinction and to spend their live investing in *fashionable* world.” The Grimké sisters passionately requested a broader education for girls than the usual knowledge of household affairs, in order to improve the general condition of society as a whole. They also denounced a persistent gender discrimination in the labor market as well as pointing to the gender wage gap as the inevitable consequences of women's cultural subjection.

The Grimké sisters influenced Ezra Heywood and Sarah E. Holmes, both pioneers in the battle for sexual liberation. Ezra Heywood (1828-1893), founded the journal *The Word* to scrutinize the woman question in a framework of sexual liberation against traditional marriage and in favor of economic independence of women. Sarah E. Holmes (1847-1929) published many

articles in [Benjamin Tucker](#)'s journal *Liberty* in order to promote the idea that sharing domestic duties would have advantaged both partners.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was likely the most prolific activist and writer of the time in the United States who combined her commitment to the woman question with the urgency of introducing women to economic matters. In her *Women and Economics* (1898), she insisted on the necessity of women becoming independent from a material point of view from their male counterparts by arguing that financial autonomy would improve not only their personal conditions but also their position within marriage as an equal partner rather than as a subjugated wife.



Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Perkins Gilman criticized the schools' programs which reinforced the cult of domesticity for girls, and proposed to move household production to the market to benefit from greater specialization and economies of scale. This shift would have enabled women to choose their own work without being forced to cover traditional roles within families. She advocated some social reforms that included the professionalization of housework as well as the building of communal living spaces with public kitchens in order to prevent isolation and frustration among many women who were forced to stay at home.

Moreover, she proposed some measures for an equal division of homework between men and women in order to strengthen the idea of sharing responsibilities between spouses, and she insisted on the necessity of educating people to consider women's self-determination in their professions as a valid way to improve the society as a whole.

The interconnection between the woman question and the economy was not relegated to the contributions of writers and activists. Women entrepreneurs of the time played a crucial role, which has been too often neglected, in promoting gender equality. Until the late 19th century, businesswomen were limited in their movements by social barriers; they were forced to use separate entrances and separate women's departments in brokerage firms and banks; they were recommended only for moderate credit and discouraged in making investments. Furthermore, the mainstream press devalued and underestimated women's entrepreneurial ambitions and barely recognized and often stigmatized women's accumulation of wealth. This combination of prejudice and chauvinism forced many women in business to wear a male face, by using their husbands and sons' names or by faking their gender identity.^[3]

Things gradually changed in the late 19th century. Many women entrepreneurs emerged. Some of them founded new firms in 'female sectors' such as beauty. This is the case of Harriet Ayer (1849-1903) who started the first cosmetic company in the United States and Ellen Demorest (1824-1898) who launched a quarterly magazine, *Mme Demorest's Mirror of Fashions*, and opened a women's fashion emporium in New York, at 473 Broadway, where she employed both black and white female workers. [Madame C. J. Walker](#) (1867-1919), aka Sarah Breedlove, became the wealthiest Black woman in the country by developing and marketing a line of beauty cosmetics and hair products for Black women through her 'Madame C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company.' the cosmetic firm she founded in 1910 in Indianapolis. The first Black entrepreneur in the United States was Sarah Gammon Bickford (1852?-1931), a

former slave, who owned the Virginia City Water Company in Montana beginning in 1890.

The role of many businesswomen was fundamental in developing social activism: they often founded several organizations, schools, journals, and firms, which aimed to promote women's education and participation in the labor market. In doing so, they transformed their financial success into political strategies to advocate women's emancipation in the name of freedom rather than equality.

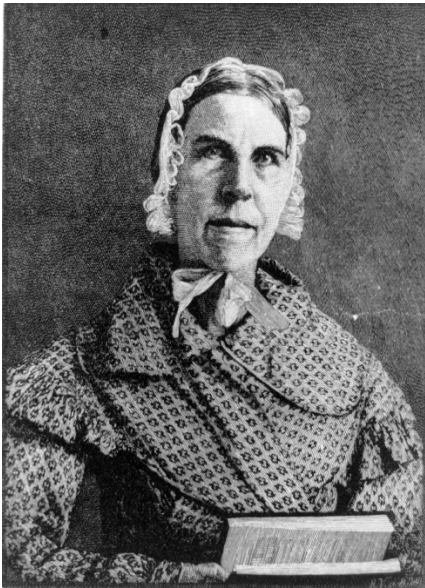
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- [1] Wollstonecraft's legacy was central for Jane Austen (1775-1817): in Austen's *Persuasion*, she perceived feminine traits (emotions, feeling and so forth) not as natural, but as the inevitable effects of social constraints. Furthermore, in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* the role of education for girls was a central vindication for women's emancipation.
- [2] The Political Economy Club was founded in 1821 to support the principles of free trade and it was promoted by economist Thomas Tooke (1774-1858), under the suggestion of David Ricardo. The first meeting, which took place on April 30, at the Freemason's Tavern, was led by James Mill who also set the rules of the group. Each meeting was aimed to discuss topics of political economy based on opening speakers who circulated a printed synopsis of their arguments (Source: LSE Online Library).
- [3] For instance, Miriam Folline Leslie (1836-1914) adopted her husband's full name (Frank Leslie) to keep alive and productive their editorial and publishing business empire after her husband's death.

REMEMBER THE LADIES: THE GRIMKÉ SISTERS

by Melissa Matthes

The [Grimké sisters](#), Angelina and Sarah, were participants in nearly every social and political movement of their time – they were abolitionists, advocates for women’s right to vote, and devoted participants in the [Second Great Awakening](#). They continue to fascinate us today not only because of the power of their sisterhood but also because they were rather unlikely candidates for the deeply precedent setting work they did in each of these movements.



Sarah Moore Grimké

The Grimkés grew up on their father’s plantation in Charleston, South Carolina- America’s fourth largest urban area and the South’s premier port. Their father, Judge John Faucheraud Grimké was a prominent lawyer as well as an innovative businessman. The family lived part of the time in one of the most admired houses in Charleston and the rest of the time in the back country on the plantation. The girls’ mother, Mary Smith (aka Polly) was the daughter of one of the city’s leading financiers and one of its wealthiest citizens. These familial conditions were clearly not the usual breeding ground for abolitionists. And, yet, both Angelina and Sarah would

become among the first and most prominent Southern women abolitionists.

There were several stories that each sister told that illuminated how they came to understand the injustice of slavery. First, the Grimké children recalled how abusive their mother was to the slaves. In fact, their mother wrote as an aggrieved plantation mistress in defense of slavery for the religious magazine, [The Church Intelligencer](#), “Would you like to stand all day with a pair of heavy shears in your hand, and cut out coarse Negro clothing? Would you like to go into the negro houses and stand hour after hour by the bed of the sick and dying, cheering, and comforting the poor creatures? Would you like to struggle and wrestle with ignorance, stupidity, and the fearful tendency to immorality – alas! Almost inherent in the negro? All around me, throughout the length and breadth of the land, are women who do this.” (Cited in Mark Perry’s [Lift Up Thy Voice: The Grimké Family’s Journey From Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leaders](#), New York: Viking Penguin, 2001, pgs.24-25)

This was the dominant view of white southern women who conceived of themselves not only as the beleaguered custodians of slave lives but as the necessary arbiters of Negro morality. It is noteworthy that part of the reason that Southern white women were so invested (literally) in slavery was because slaves were one of the few forms of property that white women, both married and unmarried, were legally permitted to own. Stephanie E. Jones has written a compelling history of this feature, [They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South](#) (New Haven: Yale University, 2019).

The Grimké children reported that witnessing their mother’s abusive behavior toward enslaved people not only alienated them from her, but also helped them to begin to recognize the trauma of slavery. Even their brother, Thomas, described being glad to leave his mother and head to Yale University in 1805. Sarah often told the story of being a student at Charleston Seminary, an elite private school for the daughters of wealthy families, when a young slave boy came into the classroom to open the window. There were deep gashes down his back and legs, and he moved in obvious pain. Angelina

fainted at the sight and then committed the image to memory. She recounted the incident repeatedly over the years, to anyone who would listen.



Similarly, Sarah described her resistance to slavery at young age when she refused to have a slave girl as her companion. She eventually relented, however, when she saw how brutally her mother treated the girl, and Sarah imagined that she (Sarah) could be a better guardian of her. The girl, Hetty, and Sarah became friends, and Sarah taught Hetty how to read until Judge Grimké discovered the violation and forbade further lessons. Hetty died several years later from an undiagnosed illness. The loss of this companion gave the young Sarah clarity about the injustice of slavery.

The intimacy of the sisters' childhood experience with enslaved people also led to one of their most radical insights as adults – slaves were Americans, not Africans. This was their, especially Sarah's, disagreement with the leading abolitionist society of the time, the [American Colonization Society](#) (founded in 1816 – among its founding members, Supreme Court Justice [John Marshall](#), [Henry Clay](#), and President [James Madison](#)) which sought a gradual but steady return of enslaved people to Africa. The society would purchase slaves and return them to Africa. Members believed that it was impossible for Blacks and whites to live together. Embedded in the belief, of course, were assumptions of Black inferiority.

In disagreement, Sarah made two points: 1) that plantation society itself proved that Black and white could live together and 2) that the ambition for separation was “un-Christian,” a violation of the imago dei (the recognition that all human beings are created in God's

image) and a sign of what she called “color prejudice.” The American Colonization Society was not really about the brutal immorality of slavery but more about the creation (and preservation) of American national identity. To the question of “Who counts as American?” the American Colonization Society answered, “White people.” Black people were different and so should be returned to their native lands. The American Colonization Society soothed the consciences of some members of white society, but it did very little to change either racial hierarchies or the Southern economy dependent on the exploitation of Black labor.

The Grimké sisters' commitment to abolition was deeply rooted in their Christian beliefs as well as in their ideals of what constituted “true womanhood.” Their abolitionist views were a counter, also, to the fears among white Southerners that the emancipation of Black men would endanger white women and lead eventually to the unholy amalgamation of the races. In 1839, artist Edward Williams Clay captured these fears in his series, “[Practical Amalgamation](#)” which showcased and fanned these grotesque and ridiculous conceptions of racial mixing.

In her most well-known address, ‘An Appeal to Christian Women of the South,’ Angelina begins with an invitation to her “sisters in Christ.” She notes that her message will contain some “unwelcome truths” but insists she is speaking these “truths in love” and like Solomon, “faithful are the wounds of a friend.” Her appeal is made through an erudite biblical exegesis – beginning with a quotation from the [Book of Esther](#) (Esther iv: 13-16)– the Jewish queen who defied the king for the good of her people. And, that's part of Angelina's appeal: Southern women will have to defy their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons for their own long term good. And, initially, this is what motivates Southern female abolitionists – saving the souls of their kinsfolk. Of less concern was the injustice done to the enslaved; more worrisome was the sinfulness of the institution and its contaminating effects on their relatives.



Although women do not make the laws, Angelina notes, “you are the wives and mothers, the sisters and daughters of those who do.” And, she notes that women already have four change promoting activities at their disposal. She recommends they 1) Read, especially the [Bible](#) which she insisted would convince them that Jesus did not sanction any system of oppression and crime 2) Pray, for the slave as well as for the master. This recommendation with its equivalency was a radical suggestion. 3) Speak, keep calm, and understand that the men in their lives are ignorant. She encourages women to make suggestions, “ask your husband to treat slaves better – to give them breakfast early and to teach them how to read and write.” 4) Act – the boldest recommendation “even if it means breaking the law.” She gives numerous examples of historical figures who have defied man made laws to serve God, “If a law command me to sin, I will break it; if it calls me to suffer, I will let it take its course unresistingly.” It’s a rather brilliant strategy – doing only what “true womanhood” is supposed to do, one can be an abolitionist, aligned with one’s Christian values. That women are God’s chosen agents is at the center of the Christian story, “He (God) hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.”

Christianity also influences the sisters’ claims for what Sarah names “the original equality of woman.” In her collection of letters [On the Equality and Conditions of](#)

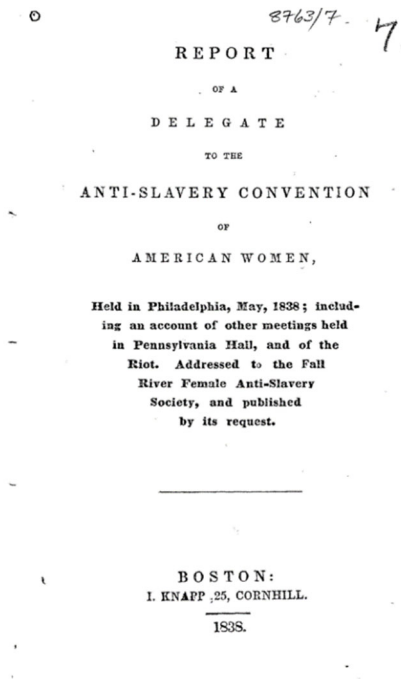
[Woman](#), Sarah explored the many topics and concerns inaugurating her growing commitment to women’s rights. The letters are addressed to Mary S. Parker, the president of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society – an interracial abolitionist organization.

In a now well-known and erudite letter, “The Original Equality of Woman” Sarah seeks to know “God’s purpose in the creation of woman.” She begins with an exegesis of the Creation story and asserts, “they were both made in the image of God; dominion was given to both over every other creature, but not over each other.” Then, in a quite caustic observation about the serpent and the eating of the forbidden fruit, Sarah concedes, “had Adam tenderly reproved his wife, and endeavored to lead her to repentance instead of sharing her guilt, I should be much more ready to accord to man that superiority which he claims.” Finally, the letter ends with an evaluation of God’s curse for this defiance. Grimké insists that translators “having been accustomed to exercise lordship over their wives and seeing only through the medium of a perverted judgment...converted a prediction to Eve into a command to Adam; for observe, it is addressed to the woman, not to the man.”

But the sister’s drive for woman’s equality was not limited to letters. Indeed, when Abigail married Theodore Weld, there were, according to Sarah’s diary, “both white and black, high and low guests.” The ceremony was brief, homemade, and ad hoc, during which the papers reported, “Weld denounced traditional marriage vows and Grimké refused to include the word obey.” The entire ceremony was officiated by a colored Presbyterian minister. Afterwards the guests shared good wishes and a wedding cake baked with “free sugar” – grown, harvested, and manufactured without slave labor. (Detailed in Mark Perry’s biography of the Grimkés, *Lift Up Thy Voice: The Grimké Family’s Journey From Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leaders* (Viking Press: New York, 2001)

In May 1838, the Anti-Slavery Convention of Women met at the Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia. Angelina was the main speaker. Throughout the city, there was considerable unrest centered around white fears of amalgamation. During her speech, rioters tossed rocks

through the stained-glass window, shattering several. Angelina did not pause asking the audience, “What is a mob? What would the breaking of every window be? What would the leveling of this Hall be? Any evidence that we are wrong, or that slavery is a good and wholesome institution? What if the mob should now burst in upon us, break up our meeting and commit violence upon our persons — would this be anything compared with what the slaves endure?” The next day the Hall was burned to the ground.



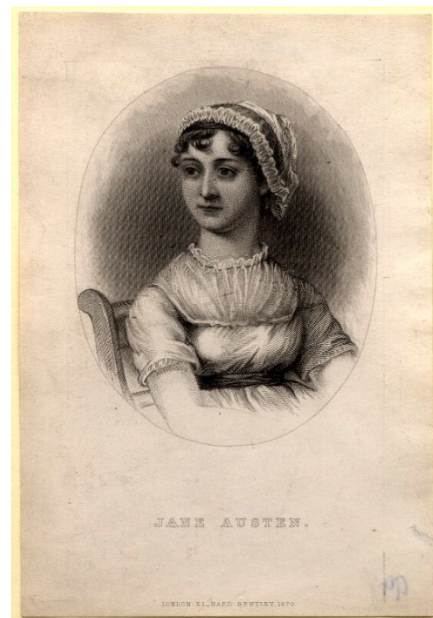
And so ended the Grimké sisters public speaking roles. The sisters, along with Angelina’s husband, Theodore Weld, retreated to Fort Lee, New Jersey where they settled on a small farm and decided to live wholly private lives. Neither Angelina nor Sarah would ever again speak in public about slavery. Sarah focused on her essay writing and Angelina, too, spent time reading and corresponding with friends, happily immersed in domesticity. The sisters also helped Theodore Weld write his magnum opus, [American Slavery As It Is](#) which was the testimony of over one thousand witnesses - including the two sisters – of the experience of slavery. The book was largely ignored by the national press, although the Grimké sisters were again attacked by their Southern relatives for their continuing betrayal.

Remembering Sarah and Angelina Grimké during Women’s History Month in 2022 reminds us that even in the most unlikely places and in the most surprising ways, women have found the moral courage to stand up for what is just and to recall others to the principles of liberty. If slaveholding women of the South could have clarity about the abomination of slavery, surely the rest of us can conjure up not only the courage but the acumen to address contemporary issues of injustice.

A SEAT AT THE TABLE, BUT ONLY ONE

by Sarah Skwire

I am a great admirer of the novels of [Jane Austen](#). The acerbic wit, the trenchant social observations, the focus on the importance of character formation and self-understanding as the basis for a good marriage, the unparalleled prose...I love it all. I love the films. The parodies. The web series. The “inspired by” novels. I have paper dolls of Jane Austen characters prominently displayed on the wall of my office. I am a fan.



Jane Austen

But I am tired of hearing about Jane Austen.

It is not Austen's fault. She remains one of my favorite authors. But I am so very tired of the way Austen is turned to, so consistently, as the "woman writer" one includes when looking for a little diversity. In a syllabus, in a set of book recommendations, or in a list of favorite authors, Austen is, too often, a banner brandished to prove the speaker is not, in fact, ignoring women.

It's weirdly reminiscent of Tom Stoppard's joke in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* about a disreputable theater troupe's performance of "*The Rape of the Sabine Women*...or rather woman...or rather Alfred." We value contributions to the history and literature of the liberty movement by women...or rather woman...or rather Austen.



Ayn Rand

Women fought for a seat at the table of liberty for a long time, but it often feels as if that's exactly what we got: One seat. And Austen is in it.

It's not as bleak as I claim, of course. Sometimes, the chair is occupied by Ayn Rand or [Mary Wollstonecraft](#). Sometimes [Harriet Taylor](#) (though generally accompanied by sneering). Americanists make space for Abigail Adams, or Sojourner Truth, or one or another of the [suffragists](#). There's usually a particular woman who is turned to as "the female voice" of a particular topic, time, or place.

But the point is that almost 30 years ago, when I entered graduate school, my cohort and I were all aggravated by precisely this same problem. And we had high hopes that the amazing scholarship being done in women's history and the great recovery of women's texts being done would address this. We looked forward to seeing a wider range of women's works and voices represented in the canon. Maybe we'd even see the end of a need for Women's History Month and Women's Studies departments. Women and their works would be so integrated into the fabric of our thought that leaving them out of the great discussions from their historical periods would be as unimaginable as leaving [George Washington](#) and [Thomas Jefferson](#) out of the history of America's founding, or leaving Dickens and [Shakespeare](#) out of the history of English literature.

I took it as a sign of great hope when Austen's work crossed over from the English department. She was [embraced by economists](#) and philosophers and others--particularly those with an interest in liberty. Austen had opened the door. Surely, the rest would rush in behind her. We had to be on the brink of a renaissance. Work on women's history and women's literature could cease being an endless project of recovering forgotten texts and figures and could begin the work of integrating those figures into important, on-going discussions.

But it's 2022 now, and I'm tired of hearing about Jane Austen.

It's not, I think, a question of tokenism. Austen's work is deeply invested in many things that we classical liberals are invested in--questions of virtue and character, questions of economic well-being, of human flourishing, of what makes a civil society, and so on. Austen nearly always has something pertinent to say and we should freely turn to her work when looking for a contribution to these conversations from a smart and capable woman. But there's something wrong with finding Austen and going no further.

All of this is a somewhat roundabout way of saying that, despite the 1980s feel of Women's History Month, and despite my younger self's hope that we'd no longer need it in the future, I think Women's History Month is

perhaps more important than ever because we don't have any excuses now.

“BUT IT’S 2022 NOW, AND I’M TIRED OF HEARING ABOUT JANE AUSTEN.”

In the mid 90s, when I entered graduate school, before I had a Facebook account, before my first book purchase on Amazon, all the texts in my class on Early Modern Women’s Poetry were Xeroxed print-outs the professor downloaded from the Brown Women Writers Project. ([now hosted at Northeastern University](#)) Some of those texts remain remarkably obscure--an anonymous poetry collection titled *Eliza’s Babes*, for example. Others are now widely available: works by Margaret Cavendish, Aemelia Lanyer, Mary Wroth, and others can now simply be purchased online, rather than ferreted out from obscure corners of the university library stacks. For \$19, you can now have a scholarly edition of all of [Elizabeth I’s collected works](#) on your Kindle instantly. Texts from BIPOC women, non-Christian women, non-English speaking women, Queer and Trans women, women from a whole range of cultures, standpoints, and communities, are more available to us every day. The work of recovering lost texts and lost voices is endless, of course, and it is an ongoing honor and responsibility.

But it is not enough to recover other voices if we recur, over and over again, to the same few. Our ongoing discussions of liberty would surely benefit from the important and interesting contributions that we are now able to access so easily. Work done in the Renaissance and Reformation period that I know best emphasizes how, in those centuries between 1500 and 1800, while women lacked full legal control of their money, their bodies, their educations, and their work they were simultaneously becoming increasingly literate and literary. Early modern women exploded into print, desperate to speak to their contemporaries and to leave a record for the future about what it is like to be denied so many liberties, yet to find ways to grab at them with both hands.

Though I am less familiar with work done outside that period and outside of the English language, we know that this holds. One of the first things that happens as the unfree find ways to educate themselves is that they write, and they speak. And they speak, it is important to add, not just about “gendered” or “minority” concerns and issues. They speak about economics. And law. And war. And peace. And God. And freedom.

It is time to stop collecting lists of names of women who--we seem permanently surprised to discover--thought deeply about their world and wrote those thoughts down. It is time to stop leaning so heavily on a few women whose work is familiar to us, or made comfortable to us by long use, consistent discussion, and elegant presentation in gilded volumes. It is time to read the women who came before Jane Austen, the women Austen read, and the ones she mocked, and the ones who responded to her.

So much work has been done recovering so many of these voices. We need to drag them into the room, invited or not. We need to slam an extra leaf or two into the table. We need to think less about whether the women we bring into the discussion of liberty are voices that people already believe to be important. We need to start insisting on the importance of the voices that we know exist, that scholars have labored to bring to light, but that are not, yet, invited to the table when the talk turns to liberty.

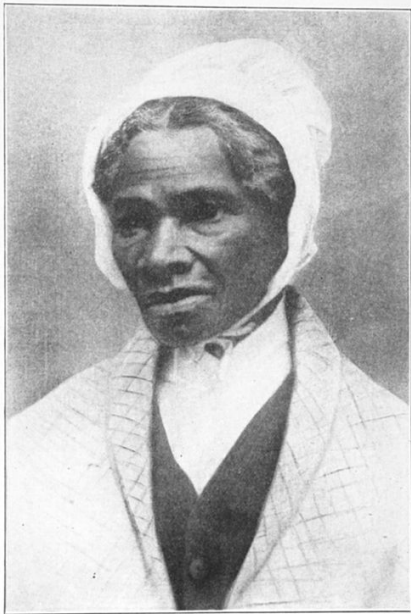
Because it is 2022. And I love Jane Austen. But I am tired of hearing about her.

KEEP STIRRING, LADIES!

by Elizabeth Amato

In 1867, Sojourner Truth delivered a speech to the [American Equal Rights Association](#) in which she observed that “[t]here is a great stir” about Black men getting the right to vote, but precious little discussion of the enfranchisement of Black women.^[1] Black women must have access to the ballot as much as Black men to secure their rights. Without it, the work of ending slavery, understood by Truth as mastery of one group over

another, is incomplete. Truth recognizes that now is the opportune moment “for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again.”



SOJOURNER TRUTH

Sojourner Truth

Building on Abigail Adams’s admonishment to “remember the ladies,” Truth’s advice is to “keep stirring”!

[Women’s History Month](#) presents not only an occasion to honor the courageous efforts of women to advance equality and liberty, but to take stock and evaluate what remains to be done. As these essays illustrate, remembering the ladies and the struggle for equality requires further “stirring.”

In her essay “The Woman Question: The Fight for Higher Education and Economic Independence,” Giandomenica Becchio picks up on an under-appreciated thread in women’s thought that [education](#) was the best strategy to gain economic independence from (usually) male relatives. In so doing, women thinkers were drawn into broader considerations of political economy and made significant contributions in their own right often linking, rightly so, the economic independence of women to the prosperity of a nation.

My summer reading list has grown as a result of Becchio’s essay. Becchio highlights the economic arguments in lesser well-known thinkers (to me) such as Sophie de Grouchy and [Jane Haldimand Marcet](#).

Economic independence is, certainly, a means of freeing women from the material conditions that held them dependent on their male relatives. But economic independence must be coupled with political liberty so that women are able to defend by the ballot their property. Moreover, deciding how to gain, use, or preserve property and the economic resources in one’s care is one of the chief ways in which individuals exercise their liberty and so choose how they want to live their lives.

Melissa Matthes’ essay “Remember the Ladies: The Grimké Sisters” begins with two observations. First, these remarkable sisters were key players in three major social and political movements in their day—abolition, women’s rights, and the Second Great Awakening. Matthes’ essay ably weaves together an account of how their religious faith animated their unshakable conviction in human equality. Second, given their beginnings on a South Carolina plantation, they were “unlikely” to be norm-breakers and precedent-setters.

Yet, as Matthes discerns, the Grimké sisters’ accounts of how they came to realize the injustice of slavery came from observing the effects of slavery at home. They saw the violence and cruelty of slavery as children and never forgot it. Given that they had perceived the injustice of slavery in the heart of slave-holding society, the Grimké understood more clearly than their primarily Northern audience that their fellow southern women were closing their eyes to it. Support of slavery was a choice. Angelina’s famous “[An Appeal to Christian Women of the South](#)” recognizes that southern women are culpable for perpetuating slavery, but invites them to change their course. Since women are equals to men, the Grimké pressed for women to accept their responsibility for the policies of their political communities.

The example of the Grimké is a powerful antidote to the slactivism one often encounters on college campuses. They endured discomfort as they aimed to live out their principles. They left their home, broke relations with

family and friends, endured ridicule and jeers (the press called Angelina “Devil-ina”), violated social and class norms, and faced violent mobs.^[2] The wedding of Angelina Grimké and Theodore Weld illustrates how they practiced their principles such as inviting Black and white guests and providing sweets made with “free sugar.”

In her essay “A Seat at the Table, but Only One,” Sarah Skwire argues that it is no longer sufficient to point to Jane Austen (or a favored few other women thinkers) as the exemplar of the woman’s perspective on human liberty. The fault, Skwire argues, can no longer be blamed on the vagaries of fortune regarding access to works by women. Texts once out of print and forgotten have been painstakingly rediscovered by scholars and, today, are often easily found online.



Edith Wharton

As an admirer of [Edith Wharton](#), I’d like for Wharton to be read and evaluated on her own without inevitable comparisons to Henry James, who, to continue Skwire’s metaphor, is always seated next to her.

Skwire is right that we should take the time to acquaint ourselves with these “new to us” voices, but not only on “gendered” or “minority” concerns and issues.” These women thought deeply and carefully about matters of perennial and permanent human concern. Here, I think,

Skwire points the way forward. The task is to bring less well-known women writers into the conversation in ways that recognize their perspective as women but takes seriously their thought on life and liberty.

[1] Sojourner Truth, “Address to the First Annual Meeting of the American Equal Rights Association” in *American Women’s Suffrage: Voices from the Long Struggle for the Vote 1776-1965*, ed. Susan Ware (New York: Library of America, 2020), 116-18.

[2] Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women’s Rights and Abolition* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 7.

REMEMBER THE LADIES: A REJOINDER

by Giandomenica Becchio

Sarah Skwire is so right: there is a Jane Austen for any season and any place. It depends on who is talking (scientists, economists, artists, political thinkers) and where the discussion is located (in the United States, in Europe, in Japan and so forth). You talk about science? Marie Curie is the usual female name that pops up. Economics? [Joan Robinson](#). Art? Artemisia Gentileschi. Political philosophy? [Olympe de Gouges](#). One seat only, as if they actually were the only female voice among thousands of male ones. This was partially true, though due to the condition of women who have been subjected to gender stereotypes that systematically reinforced and prevented them from emerging as peers with their male counterpart until a few decades ago. Nonetheless, recent developments in the history of human disciplines and science have showed us the hidden role of many women whose contributions have been forgotten or neglected.

As an economist and a historian of economic thought, I have been tried to collect and disclose the contribution of women economists within the [Austrian school of economics](#) before the emigration from Vienna in the

1930s. They worked and published in the same period of Wieser, [Mises](#) and [Hayek](#); they have been forgotten.

“THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF WOMEN REPRESENTED THE TURNING POINT OF WOMEN’S SOCIAL EMANCIPATION, AS AMATO’S ESSAYS RIGHTLY UNDERLINED BY REMEMBERING ABIGAIL ADAMS’ CONTRIBUTION. THE STARTING POINT OF ADAMS’ THOUGHT WAS THE NATURE OF TYRANNY, INTENDED AS THE LOVE OF DOMINION.”

As a passionate admirer of the Bauhaus style, I have only recently discovered that besides Gropius, Schlemmer, Mies van der Rohe, and the other well-known male names, there was a steady group of women working in Dessau along with masters. Women at the Bauhaus were allowed to enroll in the school, although curricula such as paintings, architecture, and industrial design were closed to them. Yet, under the leadership of Gunta Stölzl, they turned their weaving workshop into the financial cornerstone of the Bauhaus.

Examples like these might be countless. Pick a subject, dig into its history, and you will find forgotten ladies. And you will probably discover they were as good as the gentlemen, and in some cases they did better: both talent and performance are not a matter of gender; rather, they are a matter of natural propensity and education, or a combination of the two. In fact, I insist on pointing out that the first and foremost battle for the emancipation of women was the struggle to get the same education for boys and girls which led to the request for economic independence, legal rights and then political rights. There is no doubt that the enfranchisement of women represented the turning point of women’s social emancipation, as Amato’s essays rightly underlined by remembering Abigail Adams’ contribution. The starting

point of Adams’ thought was the nature of tyranny, intended as the love of dominion. She was clear in comparing the tyranny in the public sphere and the tyranny in the domestic sphere. And she insisted on considering marriage as a potential source of tyranny which occurs when the freedom of women is subjected to the will of their husbands, whether they are benevolent or malevolent.

The mechanism of being subjected to someone’s else dominion is tyranny *per se*.

The subjection of women within marriage (as wives) and within society (as not-fully-citizens) was strengthened by the fact that their efforts in taking care of the family was not acknowledged as a social/political task, rather it was regarded as their duty, grounded on biology. Duties imply some rights though. In fact, the request for enfranchisement was a further, albeit not the final, step on a long journey toward recognition of the rights of women as free individuals and citizens whose performance contributes to the well-being of the society as a whole.

All the Ladies who took part in this long journey belong to the story of the notion of individual freedom for all, regardless of their gender (or ethnicity). As Matthes’ essay points out, the Grimké sisters’ commitment to both [abolition](#) and women’s emancipation was an example of that fight against tyranny. No institution should harm the individual; neither marriage nor the State should be allowed to reduce the natural propensity of individuals to be free and to flourish.

As [Wollstonecraft](#) wrote in her famous essay: “Liberty is the mother of virtue, and if women are slaves by their very constitution, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom, they must always languish like exotics, and be regarded as beautiful flaws in nature.” (p.25). Liberty is a matter of education, a request for independence in spiritual and material forms. Among the Ladies who struggle for it, let me remember the Venetian philosopher, Elena Lucrezia Corner (1646-1684), the first woman who, in 1678, got a Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of Padua. She paved the way on a long journey for her (and us).

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RESPONREMEMBER FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS

by Melissa Matthes

Sarah Skwire challenges Abigail Adams’ “remember the ladies” with an important question: “Which ladies, exactly, Mrs. Adams?” It’s a terrific reminder to investigate not only who and what we remember, but *why*. It also prompts another reflection— who do we forget? And why?



Abigail Adams

In her 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf noted that for most of history, “anonymous” has been a

woman. Echoing the claim in 1971, art historian Linda Nochlin asked in her seminal essay of the same title, “Why Have there Been No Great Women Artists?” Her answer was, in part, that because women had been structurally excluded from most art education and the channels which might have afforded their work a public viewing, women often did not have the opportunity to create what counted as “art,” or they were relegated to the overlooked stepsister “crafts.” If they did have the opportunity to create “art,” they often did not sign their work. To this day, whenever I see an unsigned painting, I just assume a woman did it. (And it is interesting to note that in the first edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen signed her work only, “By a Lady”)

But there’s more here, I think. There are all the women whose lives cannot be remembered in their specificity not only because the details have been lost, but because their lives were lost to the violence, degradation, and deprivation which many forms of historical misogyny have enabled. These are the victims of domestic violence, of sexual assault, of economic penury. These are the women whose stories will never be told except as statistics and who will remain forever unknown except, perhaps, by a very few.

And here’s where Elizabeth Amato’s reminder about the importance of friendship steps in for me. In the philosophical and political tradition, friendship has traditionally been gendered male. [Aristotle](#) wrote compellingly about the importance of friendship to human flourishing. His ideas about how friendship enhances not only our lives, but also our virtue can easily be extended to women. It wasn’t until relatively recently that the value of female friendships has been noted. It is the work, political and emotional, of female friendships today to ensure that the stories of women’s lives – of their triumphs and their suffering – to move beyond Jane Austen (although Jane Austen, too, wrote quite persuasively about the joys and challenges of female friendship). It is what Alice Walker is doing in her 1983 collection, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*: it’s remembering those right next to us whose

creativity, power and suffering is often unmarked, but whose gardens are there, if sometimes lost to view.

So perhaps this Women’s History Month, we might remember the ladies who were and are friends – Eleanor Roosevelt and Pauli Murray, Marilyn Monroe and Ella Fitzgerald, Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert and, of course, [Thelma and Louise](#). Female friendship might be one of the most important ways that the stories of women’s lives are remembered and celebrated. Because if we don’t tell the stories of our friends, who will? So, when Abigail Adams says, “remember the ladies,” this month I will remember and celebrate my BFFs and the history of female friendships that helped make those life giving and soul enhancing relationships possible.

RESPONSE

by Sarah Skwire

It was a pleasure to read these essays in honor of Women’s History Month, and I was particularly pleased to see lengthy discussions of Angelina and Sarah Grimke. My eye was caught by Elizabeth Amato’s consideration of their use of the story of Queen Esther and [Purim](#). It’s a coincidence, I know, that the piece appeared on the OLL just as Purim arrived on our calendars and hamantaschen arrived in my kitchen. But the coincidence, I think, provides a useful reminder of the ways in which ancient stories provide inspiration and motivation for the important work of advocating for, seeking, and promoting the rights of women.



Esther Scroll

As an early modernist, I have long been fascinated by the space created for women’s voices in the tumultuous years of the 1650s and 60s in England. With sectarian religions seemingly cropping up overnight as a result of [Cromwell](#)’s lack of a declaration of a state religion after the execution of Charles I, there was suddenly increased cultural room not just for sects like Quakers, Ranters, Fifth Monarchists, and others, but for the voices of women to speak, write about, and publish those sectarian viewpoints. Even the Restoration--for all its language of a return to orderliness and peace--could not quiet the sectarians once they got started.

One of my personal heroes among these women is [Margaret Fell](#) who, along with her husband, George Fox, founded the Quakers in England. Fell was something of a tiger. When she was told that she could be arrested for continuing to host Quaker bible studies and meetings in her home, she responded:

I told them I should not deny my faith and principles for anything they could do unto me; and whilst it pleased the Lord to let me have a house, I would endeavour to worship him in it. So they caused the oath to be read, and tendered it unto me; and I refused it, telling them, I could not take any oath for conscience sake, Christ Jesus having forbid it. [Fell is then taken to jail and told she will be released if she will give up holding meetings] But I answered the judge that I rather chose prison for obeying God, than my

liberty for obeying men contrary to my conscience.



Margaret Fell

And she and her husband had a marriage contract that was so radical (it actually allowed Fell to keep her own property after marriage!) that they had to appear in court to defend it.

It's no surprise, then, to find that Fell--like the Grimkés--drew inspiration from, and found models for her own life in, the unruly, independent, and strong women depicted in the Hebrew Bible. In her best known work, [Women's Speaking Justified](#), Fell turns, as did the Grimkés, to the figure of Queen Esther (whom she refers to as Hester) as an example of women standing up to tyrants.

And see what glorious Expressions Queen Hester used to comfort the People of God, which was the Church of God, as you may read in the Book of *Hester*, which caused Joy and Gladness of Heart among all the Jews, who prayed and worshipped the Lord in all places; who jeopardd her Life contrary to the King's Command, went and spoke to the King, in the Wisdom and Fear of the Lord, by which means she saved the Lives of the People of God; and righteous *Mordecai* did not forbid her speaking, but said, If she held her Peace, her and her

Father's House should be destroyed. And herein, you blind Priests, are contrary to righteous *Mordecai*.

But my favorite thing about Fell is that she doesn't take Esther just as a literary allusion. Fell actually takes her as a model for her own political behavior. She frequented Whitehall during the early years of Charles II's reign, hand-delivering letter after letter and pamphlet after pamphlet to the King and his family and courtiers, in the hopes of obtaining better treatment and freer religious practice for Quakers in England. And Fell's missives pulled no punches. A [fairly typical passage](#) from a letter to the King runs:

It is strongly on my heart once more to give thee warning to take care of these things, to take a little view of them betimes before it is too late. You have made an act against us, for what cause the Lord knows, we being harmless and innocent, and tender towards you, although our sufferings have been great; but since you have made a law, it is unreasonable you should exceed it in severity.

Fell's bold insistence on equitable treatment and the assumption that women should be a part of the political and theological conversation of the time must have been an inspiration to the Grimkés who converted to Quakerism in the 1820s. I do not think it is far-fetched to suspect that they had read the work of Quakerism's founder, Margaret Fell, and integrated some of her arguments and images--and her use of Queen Esther--into their own work.

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