



# EVERY PATH LAID OPEN TO WOMAN AS FREELY AS TO MAN

## FEMALE AUTONOMY IN A MALE-DOMINATED WORLD

### IN CONTEXT

#### PRIMARY QUOTE

**Margaret Fuller, 1845**

#### KEY FIGURES

**Frances (Fanny) Wright,  
Harriet Martineau,  
Margaret Fuller**

#### BEFORE

**1810** Sweden grants women the right to work in all guild professions, trades, and handicrafts.

**1811** In Austria, married women are permitted financial independence and the right to choose a profession.

#### AFTER

**1848** Three US states (New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island) grant new property acts that give women control of what they own.

**1870** The Married Women's Property Act allows married British women to have money and inherit property.

**A**s the Industrial Revolution (1760–1840) gathered pace in the early 19th century, women began to examine their status in societies that increasingly emphasized the importance of performing productive labor. French philosopher and utopian socialist Charles Fourier, who coined the term *féminisme*, advocated a new world order that was based on cooperative autonomy for men and women alike. He believed that all work should be open to women, according to their individual skills, interests, and aptitudes, and that their contribution—free from patriarchal oppression—was vital for a harmonious, productive society. His views spread from Europe to the US, where, in the 1840s and '50s, supporters of his ideas created a number of utopian communities in which men and women lived and worked cooperatively.

#### Thinkers and writers

Frances (Fanny) Wright, a Scottish-born feminist, freethinker, and abolitionist living in America, advocated Fourier's beliefs. In a series of letters published as *Views of Society and Manners in America* in 1821, she asserts that American



**Educated women** had few ways to earn a good living. From the 1870s, the introduction of typewriters—such as this one, made by Scholes & Glidden—led to opportunities for office work.

women were “assuming their place as thinking beings” but were hampered by their lack of financial and legal rights. She spent time in the utopian community of New Harmony, Indiana, founded by the Welsh social reformer Robert Owen, a follower of Fourier, and became the first woman in America to edit a journal, *The New Harmony Gazette*. In 1829, she moved to New York,

**See also:** Enlightenment feminism 28–33 • Marriage and work 70–71 • Rights for married women 72–75 • Intellectual freedom 106–107



The extension of women's rights is the basic principle of all social progress.

**Charles Fourier**



where she broke the taboo on female public speaking and gave lectures calling for the emancipation of slaves and women, legal rights for wives, liberal divorce laws, and the introduction of birth control.

British writer Harriet Martineau tackled social, economic, and political issues that were more usually discussed by men. She rose to prominence with *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832), 25 fictional “portraits” describing the impact of economic conditions on ordinary people at different levels of society. Martineau traveled to the US in 1834–1836, to examine its professed democratic principles, and then published her findings in *Society in America* in 1837. One chapter, “The Political Non-existence of Woman,” notes that women receive “indulgence rather than justice” and calls for women to be better educated so they can exist without the financial support and control of men.

A few years later, the American journalist Margaret Fuller added her voice to these feminist writers with the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1845. The book envisages a new awakening,

in which independent women would build a better society on an equal footing with men. While accepting physical differences between the sexes, Fuller rejects defined attributes for each gender, writing, “There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman,” a remark that was well ahead of her time.

#### Lasting influence

Such women inspired the fight for female emancipation in the US and Europe, and in the second half of the 19th century, a new wave of female campaigners would make their voices heard—a force that governments were eventually compelled to recognize. While these voices were generally from the middle-classes, the huge growth in business enterprises and bureaucracy fueled a demand for literate women from the working and lower middle classes to become stenographers, copyists, and bookkeepers—roles previously filled by men. However, any personal autonomy and satisfaction that such employment might have brought was reduced by its low pay and low status—women's work was still seen as secondary to men's. ■



There exists in the minds of men a tone of feeling toward women as toward slaves.

**Margaret Fuller**



**Harriet Martineau**

Born in Norwich, UK, in 1802, the daughter of a cloth merchant, Harriet Martineau received a good education, but was confined to the domestic sphere by her mother's strict views on traditional gender roles. After her father's death in 1826, Martineau broke with convention to earn a living as a journalist, despite having been deaf since the age of 12.

The notable success of Martineau's *Illustrations of Political Economy* enabled her to move to London in 1832, where she met influential thinkers such as John Stuart Mill. After traveling to America and the Middle East, Martineau returned home and continued writing. Publishing more than 50 books and 2,000 articles, she campaigned for women's education, civil liberties, and suffrage all her life. She died in 1876 at a house she had designed and built in the Lake District.

#### Key works

**1832** *Illustrations of Political Economy*  
**1836** *Philosophical Essays*  
**1837** *Society in America*  
**1848** *Household Education*