

# *On Equality for Women*

Sarah Grimké



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## **OVERVIEW**

Abolitionist Sarah Grimké and her sister Angelina were born on a plantation in South Carolina. The sisters witnessed the immorality of slavery firsthand and moved to Philadelphia to speak out against slavery. They also spoke for women's rights. In this 1837 letter, Sarah expresses her views on the status of women.

**GUIDED READING** As you read, consider the following questions:

- According to Grimké, why can't a woman be guiltless concerning the issue of slavery?
  - How does Grimké argue for equal wages for men and women?
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**D**uring the early part of my life, my lot was cast among the butterflies of the fashionable world. And of this class of women, I [have to] say, both from experience and observation, that their education is miserably deficient [incomplete]. . . . They are taught to regard marriage as the one thing needful, the only avenue of distinction. . . . To attract the notice and win the attentions of men by their external charms is the chief business of fashionable girls. . . . Fashionable women regard themselves, and are regarded by men, as pretty toys or as mere instruments of pleasure. . . .

There is another way in which the general opinion—that women are inferior to men—is manifested [shown], that bears with tremendous effect on the laboring class and indeed on almost all who are obliged to earn a subsistence [living], whether it be by mental or physical exertion. I allude [refer] to the [unequal] value set on the time and labor of men and of women. A man who is engaged in teaching can always, I believe, command a higher price . . . than a woman—even when he teaches the same branches [subjects] and is not in any respect superior to the woman. This I know is the case in boarding and other schools with which I have been acquainted. . . . In tailoring, a man [earns] twice or three times as much for making a waistcoat or pantaloons as a woman, although the work done by each may be equally good. In those employments which are peculiar to women, their time is estimated at only half the value of that of men. A woman who goes out to wash works as hard in proportion as a wood sawyer or a coal heaver, but she is not generally able to make more than half as much by a day's work. . . .

There is another class of women in this country, to whom I cannot refer without feelings of the deepest shame and sorrow. I allude to our female slaves. . . .

Can any American woman look at [such immorality] and cruelty and fold her hands in apathy [indifference] and say, "I have nothing to do with slavery"? She cannot and be guiltless.