



Vindication of the Rights of Women (Forgotten Books)

Mary David Wollstonecraft

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A *Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), written by the eighteenth-century British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy. In it, Wollstonecraft responds to the educational and political theorists of the eighteenth century who wanted to deny women an education. She argues that women ought to have an education commensurate with their position in society, claiming that women are essential to the nation because they educate its children and because they could be "companions" to their husbands, rather than mere wives. Instead of viewing women as ornaments to society or property to be traded in marriage, Wollstonecraft maintains that they are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men.

Wollstonecraft was prompted to write the *Rights of Woman* by Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord's 1791 report to the French National Assembly which stated that women should only receive a domestic education; she used her commentary on this specific event to launch a broad attack against sexual double standards and to indict men for encouraging women to indulge in excessive emotion. Wollstonecraft wrote the *Rights of Woman* hurriedly in order to respond directly to ongoing events; she intended to write a more thoughtful second volume, but she died before completing it.

While Wollstonecraft does call for equality between the sexes in particular areas of life, such as morality, she does not explicitly state that men and women are equal. Her ambiguous statements regarding the equality of the sexes have since made it difficult to classify Wollstonecraft as a modern feminist, particularly since the word and the concept were unavailable to her. Although it is commonly assumed now that the *Rights of Woman* was unfavourably received, this is a modern

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