

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# A Vindication of the Rights of Women

by Mary Wollstonecraft

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) was an English philosopher and women's rights advocate. Wollstonecraft became an influential figure of the European enlightenment period. Wollstonecraft is best known for her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* written in 1792, in which she argues that women are not naturally inferior to men. Her views contradict those of most Enlightenment thinkers; especially Rousseau, who argues about the inferiority of women to men.

## Primary Source:

Consider—I address you as a legislator—whether, when men contend for their freedom, and to be allowed to judge for themselves respecting their own happiness, it be not inconsistent and unjust to **subjugate** women, even though you firmly believe that you are acting in the manner best calculated to promote their happiness? Who made man the exclusive judge, if woman partake with him of the gift of reason?

But if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from participation of the natural rights of mankind, prove first, to ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency, that they want reason, else this flaw in your NEW CONSTITUTION will ever show that man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality.

The adoption of this system of inequality never was the result of deliberation, or forethought, or any social ideas, or any notion whatever of what conduced to the benefit of humanity or the good order of society. It arose simply from the fact that from the very earliest twilight of human society, every woman (owing to the value attached to her by men, combined with her inferiority in muscular strength) was found in a state of **bondage** to some man...

Under whatever conditions, and within whatever limits, men are admitted to the **suffrage**, there is not a shadow of **justification** for not admitting women under the same...

## Glossary:

**subjugate:** to bring under control; enslave

**bondage:** slavery

**suffrage:** right to vote

**justification:** logic or reason

**Citation:** Mary Wollstonecraft, "To M. Talleyrand-Périgord Late Bishop of Autun" in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1792), n.p.