



## *Women's Rights* in Frances (Fanny) Wright (1795–1852)

Therese Boos Dykeman

The United States' *Constitution* and its *Declaration of Independence* in hand and threats to her life pushed aside, Frances Wright lectured on the rights of women by appealing "to reason," moral feeling, and to what is "consistent with the being of a republic." She argued that "all men are born free and equal," than asks "but do they so live?" "Human improvement" advances but feebly when "we circumscribe the power of one half of our race, and that half by far the most important and influential." To have the equality that those documents promised, women must have superior education and emancipation. But women have been excluded from "free inquiry" thus forcing them to be "mental slaves." Above all, Wright argued, to pursue happiness, women must have the freedom to do so.

Wright's philosophical and distinguishing principle of "human improvement," presents a moral mandate for rights to equality and freedom. Women's "improvement," based on these rights must seek education, recognizing that "truth" has no sex, and that education depends on the "joint enterprise of both women and men." Parents should not merely educate women "for the market of marriage," for women have the right to be engaged in such important activities as seeing to the poor, the aged, and those in "childhood," which as well require "cooperative action." In all, women must take the lead "on the side of humanity, union, order, right reason, and right feeling" to counteract the "selfish principle" driving society.

Frances Wright used herself as an example of an educated woman speaking publicly in order to gain "human improvement" and be champion of "humankind." In all, women must have the rights to their own body and the independence, free from oppression, to know who they are, what morality is, and to think and act for themselves.

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