



## Slavery in Frances (Fanny) Wright (1795–1852)

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In 1825 Frances Wright became the first woman in the United States to publicly oppose slavery and to influence other women to speak publicly on abolition and suffrage. She reasoned that understanding “the principle of human liberty” is to “know the principle of human conduct!” With such knowledge, passion would yield to reason, selfishness to justice, and equal rights of others to “supply the sole [...] immutable limits of our own.” With that: “There is but one honest limit to the rights of a sentient being; it is where they touch the rights of another sentient being.” When we “forget what in justice is due to others,” “we sin against liberty” and pass from “freemen to that of tyrants or slaves.” Slavery is thus unreasonable and immoral, a “sin against liberty,” equality being the “soul of liberty” in “the seat of the mind.”

Wright first witnessed slavery in 1818 on her trip to the United States from England and Scotland. Understanding the nature and ethics of slavery, she knew that to remedy the problem, like any other problem, would take experimentation in order to know the best solution. Believing the problem of slavery would not be solved by the Federal government, but by the states which had closer representation to the people, she decided, armed with moral reasoning, to launch an experiment on her own. She took her proposal to Thomas Jefferson in 1824 who then wrote that it would be a “well-worthy of trial.” The trial, Nashoba, in its attempt to carry out a work-study program for many reasons ended in disaster. The slaves she bought were freed in Haiti four years later. Her theory was that slaves, denied liberty and equality, lacked the preparation and education to successfully live their lives as free and equal members of society.

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