

**An important treatise that promoted equal education for women as the key to progress**

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the rights of women*. London: J. Johnson, 1792. 8 3/8 inches x 4 7/8 inches (213 x 121 mm), 476 pages.

It is hard not to think of *A Vindication of the rights of women* as a cornerstone of feminist polemic, but it is a cornerstone firmly embedded in the foundations of its time. Like many educated women of the period, from Hannah More to Maria Edgeworth, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) was drawn or driven to teaching and moral instruction of the young. She set up a school in a London suburb in the 1780s and later became a governess. Her first book, *Thoughts on the education of daughters*, appeared in 1787. It is possible to argue that *A Vindication* is in fact a treatise on education in the guise of a feminist tract. It is, after all, “built on this simple principle that, if woman be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge, for truth must be common to all.”

Equal and not separate education, ideally under state control, was her suggested means of elevating women to a position of partnership with men. Culture not nature, she claimed, had made women vain, indolent, irrational, superstitious, cunning, fickle, and frivolous. The same might be said, indeed, of the class system, even in relation to men. Wollstonecraft’s egalitarian principles applied equally to the distinction between rich and poor. *A Vindication of the rights of women* is thus a book that ranges widely through the realms of gender and politics. It is a revolutionary as well as a feminist manifesto.

This copy, from the Remnant Trust, is in a binding of contemporary calf and was rebacked retaining the original title label. The front pastedown bears the bookplate of the Remnant Trust, with an accession date of 1997.

PMM 242.

Octavo code: wolvin