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Inventing Feminism: Wollstonecraft, Mill, and Women's Rights Activism

by **Eileen Hunt Botting**

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HS G (old building, Innrain 52, 2nd floor)

Abstract

Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill were the leading philosophers of women's rights in the nineteenth century, and as such they definitively shaped the invention of the concepts, arguments, and practices of feminism. Through the international reception of her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft helped invent the language and logic of women's rights discourse. In the late Victorian era—especially after the global success of his book *The Subjection of Women* (1869)—Mill and his followers made women's rights discourse more practical and politically influential by adapting it to the reformist goals of the women's suffrage movement. At the turn of the twentieth century, the term “feminist” came to be used to describe moral and political commitments to women's rights. By using Wollstonecraft and Mill to authorize, market, and direct their activism, turn-of-the-century women's rights advocates from around the globe contributed to the invention of feminism and several strands of feminism that remain central to politics today.



Eileen Hunt Botting

Eileen Hunt Botting is Thomas J. and Robert T. Rolfs Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the Gender Studies Program. She is the author of *Family Feuds: Wollstonecraft, Burke, and Rousseau on the Transformation of the Family* (2006), co-editor of the book *Feminist Interpretations of Alexis de Tocqueville* (2008), and currently writing a book entitled *Globalizing Feminisms: Wollstonecraft, Mill, and the Women's Suffragists*. At Notre Dame University, Eileen Botting teaches courses in Political Science and Gender Studies, and political theory in the Glynn Family Honors Program. Her fields of research include early modern political thought, Enlightenment political thought, feminist political thought, American political thought, and Christian political thought.

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