

Olympe de Gouges

born *May 7, 1748*
died *November 3, 1793*



Olympe de Gouges was a French essayist, playwright and political activist. She is best known for her advocacy for women's rights and abolition that had a wide international audience.

Raised in a bourgeois family, Gouges was married off against her will at the age of 16. Her husband died the following year and she never married again, referring to marriage as "the tomb of trust and love." In 1770 she moved to Paris, where her romantic partner helped her establish a theater company.

Gouges received a lot of pushback for being a woman of letters and a woman in the theater, and she used both to promote her philosophical beliefs. She attended many salons and published essays demanding abolition (*Réflexions sur les hommes nègres*), demanding equal rights for women (*Déclaration des droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*) and advocating for the Revolution (although she withdrew her support when she found that the revolutionaries did not extend their list of human rights to women). She also published *Contrat Social*, arguing for marriage based on gender equality.

Gouges supported a constitutional monarchy and opposed capital punishment. She wrote against the execution of King Louis and her writings were eventually deemed treasonously pro-royalty. She was put on trial for sedition and was denied representation. She represented herself and continued to publish her writings until her execution at the age of 45.