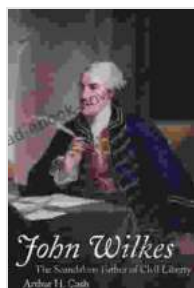


# John Wilkes: The Scandalous Father of Civil Liberty

John Wilkes was a radical politician, journalist, and one of the most controversial figures of 18th-century England. He was a champion of civil liberties and free speech, and his trial for seditious libel helped to establish the principle of freedom of the press. Wilkes was also a notorious libertine and rake, and his scandalous personal life made him a target of both admiration and revulsion.



## John Wilkes: The Scandalous Father of Civil Liberty

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 7267 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 497 pages



## Early Life and Education

John Wilkes was born in London on October 17, 1725. His father was a wealthy distiller, and Wilkes received a privileged education at Westminster School and the University of Leiden. After graduating from university, Wilkes embarked on a Grand Tour of Europe, where he indulged in the pleasures of life and developed a taste for radical politics.

## Political Career

Wilkes entered politics in 1757, when he was elected to Parliament as the member for Aylesbury. He quickly became a vocal critic of the government, and his speeches and writings often caused outrage. In 1763, he published an article in his newspaper, the *North Briton*, that attacked the king's speech. Wilkes was arrested and charged with seditious libel, and he was expelled from Parliament.

Wilkes's trial for seditious libel was a landmark case in the history of freedom of the press. The jury found Wilkes guilty, but the verdict was later overturned on appeal. The case helped to establish the principle that the truth could be a defense against a charge of seditious libel.

## **Personal Life**

Wilkes was a notorious libertine and rake. He had numerous affairs, and he was often involved in scandals. In 1768, he was accused of abducting a young woman named Martha Ray. Wilkes was acquitted of the charges, but the scandal damaged his reputation.

## **Later Life and Legacy**

Wilkes continued to be involved in politics until his death in 1797. He was elected to Parliament several times, and he served as Lord Mayor of London from 1774 to 1775. Wilkes's legacy is complex. He was a champion of civil liberties and free speech, but he was also a libertine and a rake. His personal life often overshadowed his political achievements, but he remains an important figure in the history of English radicalism.

## **Additional Resources**

\* The John Wilkes Collection at the British Library \* John Wilkes: A Resource for Teachers \* John Wilkes: The Scandalous Father of Civil



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