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# Women of the American Revolution

A Unit of Study for Grades 5–8

Jim Pearson



National Center for History in the Schools  
University of California, Los Angeles

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Cover Illustration: "Detail of a woodcut illustration from 'A New Touch on the Times. Well adapted to the distressing situation of every seaport town.' By a Daughter of Liberty, living in Marblehead." Broadside, 1779. Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society, N.Y.C.

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# **Women of the American Revolution**

**A Unit of Study for Grades 5–8**

**Jim Pearson**

**National Center for History in the Schools  
University of California, Los Angeles**

## Acknowledgments

Jim Pearson is an elementary school teacher in Santa Barbara, California. He developed this unit with Supervising Historian Gary B. Nash while he was a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles. Tom Ingersoll served as the Unit Editor.

Linda Symcox authored the original introductory material and was Project Director when the unit was first published. The Center also acknowledges the important contributions of the following to the original version of this teaching unit: Margaret McMillen for photo research and copyediting; Leticia Zermeno for copyright-research activities; Alexey Root for proofreading; and Pamela Hamilton for assistance in inputting and desktop publishing. Special appreciation is due to Brenda Thomas who created the desktop layouts and unit designs, and brought the publication to final completion.

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## INTRODUCTION

### APPROACH AND RATIONALE

**W**omen of the American Revolution is one of over sixty teaching units published by the National Center for History in the Schools that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. The units represent specific issues and dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying crucial turningpoints in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected issues and dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers, magazines, literature, contemporary photographs, paintings, and other art from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

### CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

**W**ithin this unit, you will find: Teaching Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History, Unit Objectives, and Introduction to *Women of the American Revolution*; A Dramatic Moment; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by grades 5–8, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

## Introduction

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The Teacher Background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the historical information and context necessary to link the **Dramatic Moment** (written by author Jim Pearson) to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.



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## TEACHER BACKGROUND

### I. UNIT OVERVIEW

Relying on primary sources, this unit introduces students to the American Revolution. The lessons divide the conflict into three periods: the friction leading to the war, the struggle for independence, and the expectations that shaped people's participation. The feature which distinguishes this treatment of the Revolution from other lessons is a focus on the conflict from the perspective of women.

The importance of women in the development of American society is only now beginning to be fully recognized. Although women have always comprised more than half of the population, their presence in recorded history has been marginal. Until recent decades, most historians focused their interest on political, military, or commercial leaders. With few exceptions, women had traditionally been excluded from these careers of public power. However, the study of history has changed dramatically in the last generation. Historians have come to recognize the important roles that ordinary people, male and female, have had in shaping our nation. A more inclusive picture of the past which considers the contributions of people previously neglected in historical writing not only more accurately describes the past, but will help students appreciate that they too have a role in history's pageant. Moreover, an accurate account of the past can partially explain some of the enduring social inequalities which are the consequence of culture, not biology. Seeing the gradual transformation of social values and practices can give students both a sense of their capacity to influence their community and an appreciation of how their community, in turn, shapes them.

The focus on women, while intended in part as a corrective for the general neglect of women in history, is more than a gesture. During the Revolutionary Era women comprised half of colonial society. Their contributions were crucial to the final victory. Although most women were noncombatants, they were subjected to the consequences of war, including suffering, violence, and death.

### II. UNIT CONTEXT

This unit should be taught after studying the late colonial period and prior to examining the Constitution and early republic. While this unit is designed to be an adequate introduction to the Revolution, some teachers will want to treat the nation's founding in greater depth. This unit could therefore complement more traditional treatments of the Revolution. The first lesson can be used to introduce a more extended examination of the causes of the Revolution. The second lesson can be taught in conjunction with lessons on the campaigns and battles. The last two lessons can be used to discuss the legacy of the Revolution. Students can consider how far the Revolution succeeded in achieving its goals.

### **III. CORRELATION TO NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS**

**W**omen of the American Revolution provides teaching materials that address *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), **Era 3**, “Revolution and the New Nation (1754–1820s).” Lessons specifically address **Standard 2C**, which calls for an analysis of the ideas put forth arguing for women’s roles and rights during the revolutionary era.

Lessons within this unit likewise address a number of specific **Historical Thinking Standards** including: “Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative and assess its credibility” (**Standard 2**); “Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas and values” (**Standard 3**); “Identify gaps in the available records and marshal contextual knowledge and perspectives of time and place to elaborate on the evidence” (**Standard 4**); and “Identify issues and problems in the past” (**Standard 5**).

### **III. OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand that women not only comprised half the population of Revolutionary America, but were instrumental in achieving victory.
2. To explore the growing resistance in colonial America to England’s rule.
3. To appreciate that wars require enormous sacrifice by everyone involved, not just soldiers.
4. To learn that while some people fought for the independence of the colonies, others joined the struggle in the hope of creating a new, more democratic society.
5. To speculate on the surprising consequences of human actions by considering some of the unintended effects of the Revolution on the social role of women.

#### IV. INTRODUCTION TO *American Women of the Revolution*

##### **Eighteenth-Century Colonial Women**

Options for women in eighteenth-century colonial society were far more restricted than they are today. Although women's roles may seem familiar to students, two hundred years ago these familiar tasks were very different. Colonial women were supposed to be loyal helpmates to their husbands. Since the only status a woman could expect to achieve was through the man she married, nearly all colonial women married. Once married, women ceased to have any legally independent existence; under English common law they were *femes covert*, which meant that husbands were protectors as well as absolute masters. With no legally independent existence, a woman's social existence was largely defined by the position of her husband. Even a woman's property and wages accrued to the husband after marriage. Women moved through the world under the control of men—from father to husband. This system kept women from gaining autonomy. The general conviction that only economically independent people were capable of exercising the freedom of choice necessary to take a responsible role in the public arena of politics and commerce left women confined to a domestic sphere, relying on the males of their families to represent their needs. Consequently, women were locked in a system of social dependence from which there was only occasional escape.

While women were allowed only a limited public role, they were neither passive nor unimportant. Eighteenth-century women ran households and raised children. Being a good wife required an array of skills that are no longer associated with household management. In addition to cooking and cleaning, women butchered fowl they had raised, smoked meat, made cheese from the milk they had taken from the cow, sewed clothes from the cloth they had spun, made soap, and preserved vegetables they had grown. Moreover, limited technology meant that many of these chores, like laundry, were back-wrenching, tiresome, all-day jobs involving heavy hauling and firm muscles. Other jobs, like sewing, required dexterity. Usually barred by social conventions from prominent roles in commerce, women were still expected to manage the household economy.

The social significance of women became increasingly apparent to both men and women as the colonies struggled to secure their independence. During the Revolution, some skills regarded as feminine, like spinning, became more widely appreciated. The war also gave some women the opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to assume responsibilities regarded as male. For instance, many women took charge of family farms, carrying out every task from planning what, when, and how much to plant, to marketing the surplus harvest. Historians have noted that during the war, in their letters to husbands, women often changed from writing "your farm" to "our farm." This seemingly

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## Teacher Background Materials

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trivial linguistic transition marks an important shift in thinking. The Revolutionary War did not substantially change the material lives of most women; the battle for equality would be taken up by their daughters and granddaughters. But while the women's roles may actually have become more narrowly and rigidly defined after the Revolution, women's status improved. Women's intelligence and capacities were grudgingly acknowledged. Women came to have more choice in marriage; the importance of motherhood was recognized, and opportunities for education improved.

### The Revolutionary War

The part of the Revolution with which everyone is familiar was the struggle for independence. Less familiar was the struggle within America to redefine social roles and the nature and structure of society. The ethnically diverse, heterogeneous, patriotic population of the Revolutionary period was unified only in its determination to beat the British. Wealthier, better established Americans often fought for conservative reasons. They wanted to preserve their traditional rights as Englishmen, which they believed were being subverted by a corrupt British empire. The poorer folk joined the Revolution in the hope of improving their station. Many of the regulars in Washington's army had joined for cash bounties and the promise of land. Other poor people saw the war as an opportunity to realign social arrangements, forever casting off habits of deference which had been conspicuous aspects of hierarchical pre-Revolutionary America. Women joined the struggle for similarly diverse reasons. As traditional helpmates to their well-heeled husbands, some wanted to provide support and preserve the status quo being threatened by imperial England. Others sought to make their society freer, more open and fluid, thereby improving the diversity of options available to women. Still others may simply have seized the opportunity to take more public, active and respected roles in areas of society traditionally barred to them. Thus, beyond achieving national independence and formulating the political philosophy, of the new nation, the revolution also called into question long established social and political relationships and demarcated an agenda for reform that would preoccupy Americans down to the present day.

## V. LESSON PLANS

1. Daughters of Liberty
2. Women in the Revolution
3. Remember the Ladies
4. Republican Mothers

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## Dramatic Moment Boston Women Protest

On a warm Boston afternoon in July 1777, Thomas Boylston stood at the door of his warehouse staring grimly at the crowd of determined women filling the street. Some gripped wheelbarrows or stood beside carts, others wearing fine silk held umbrellas against the afternoon sun. Most were women in clean homespun, plain but neat. Squarely in front stood Mrs. Colter, who when the crowd became silent said politely but firmly, "We know you have coffee Mr. Boylston. Give it over to us at the Committee's price and we'll be pleased to pay."

"On your way. You'll not be having my coffee at such prices. It's mine bought and paid for. Who's this so called Committee of Patriots to be telling me what I can and cannot sell and for how much? My business is trade—buying and selling. The goods are mine. There's plenty of folks with no stomach for war, but possessing a taste for coffee and the silver to satisfy it."

"Mr. Boylston, the only hope for us is sharing. The soldiers need theirs and we need ours. There being so little going around, surely we must all look to help each other. We won't have you bleeding and squeezing decent folks. Give us the keys and we'll divide the goods fairly and pay what's right."

Trembling with fear and rage, Boylston edged back through the door. But a large framed woman standing next to Mrs. Colter saw this movement. Before he could slam the door, she stepped forward, seized him by his collar, and heaved the little man into a cart. Boylston's eyes got round as saucers and nearly popped from his head; he opened and closed his mouth like a fish, not making a sound; sweat glistened on his face. Lying on his back staring up from the cart, Boylston found himself surrounded by a ring of women glaring down at him.

Slowly he reached into his vest and drew out his keys. As Mrs. Colter took them, someone tipped the cart, dumping Boylston into the street. Boylston scrambled through the crowd. His retreating backside made an irresistible target for the slaps and kicks of women long tired of his arrogance and greed. The rest of the women swept into the warehouse, found the hidden coffee, di-

## Dramatic Moment

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vided it into the carts, and left. Throughout this spectacle men stood at the edge of the crowd. Many smiled at Boylston's fate, but they kept quiet. Clearly, the women were not inclined to be teased, and the watching men were not quite sure they should be cheered. The war had changed Boston, but crowds of unaccompanied women taking public action was not a sight most men welcomed. Men depended on the support of women, but did not want them to forget their "proper" roles as wives and mothers.

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## LESSON ONE

### DAUGHTERS OF LIBERTY

#### A. OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To learn the role colonial women played in the turmoil that preceded the Revolution.
- ◆ To understand some of the causes that led to the Revolution.
- ◆ To practice interpreting documents which reflect various points of view.

#### B. LESSON ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to explain what they know about the Revolutionary War. See if anyone knows the causes of the war and why America wanted to be independent. Students may respond with generalities, like “to be free,” but will probably not know much. Tell them that they are going to study the Revolutionary War. This lesson will focus on the growing hostility between England and its American colonies by examining the role taken by colonial women during this period.

#### **Teacher Background for Activity #1:**

Before students can understand the causes of the Revolution, they need to understand some background information. Students must know the meanings of “colony,” “tax,” and “boycott.” Americans were colonists who thought of themselves as English. As English citizens, they thought they were entitled to decide their own taxes. England and its American colonies had just fought a seven year war against France and its colony, Canada. When England and its American colonies won the war, Canada became another colony of England. The war cost England an enormous amount of money. After the war, Britain left thousands of English soldiers in the colonies to guard the western frontier and keep order in the colonies. The English government, Parliament, wanted to raise American taxes and make the colonists provide food and housing for the soldiers. Most American colonists felt they had already done enough to help England. They also believed that their own

## Lesson One

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colonial governments should set the taxes, rather than the distant English Parliament where they had no representation. England decided to tax goods most often imported into the colonies, like sugar, glass, and tea.

2. Once students understand the source of the conflict, ask them to imagine what the colonists decided to do about these taxes. How could people living in colonial America avoid paying them? Tell students they are going to read some documents that historians use to study the colonists' responses to England's attempt to tighten control over the colonies.
3. Pass out **Document A1**, "Patriotic Poesy," a poem copied into the commonplace book of Milcah Martha Moore in 1768; or **A2**, a modern version of the poem. Have the class read the poem. In **Document A1** several key words are underlined and explained in the right column to guide students reading the original version of the poem.
  - a. Students should understand the document's main idea, that the poem is calling on women to boycott taxable imports.
  - b. Ask them to assume the role of historians and discuss what this poem reveals about colonial life in 1768.

### **A Note to the Teacher:**

Appealing to women on the basis of public political responsibility is the most startling feature of this poem. Until recently, historians felt that because women were not allowed to vote and their social role was largely restricted to the home, people of the eighteenth century did not recognize the political significance of women. Indeed, when women were asked for help, the pleas were usually appeals to their sense of duty as wives and mothers. During the Revolution requests for women's help were still typically based on women's domestic nature. But this document shows a recognition that women were capable of public and political behavior. This new appreciation of women's capacities would propel women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to demand their rights as citizens.

- c. If students have difficulty in understanding the poem's significance, prompt them with the following questions:
  - How are women described?



- Are women described as mothers or wives?
  - What are women being asked to do?
  - Why are they being asked to do it?
  - In this poem, how are women and men compared?
  - Who is Grenville?
  - What does the poem's author hope will happen to merchants?
4. When students understand the significance of this document, have them read **Document B**, a "Revolutionary Broadside" published in January, 1770 in Boston. They should note that it is addressed to the Sons and Daughters of Liberty.'
- a. Ask the students the purpose of this document. If they do not make the analogy between this document and a billboard, lead them to this insight. They should understand that this is a public appeal to stop shopping at William Jackson's store.
  - b. Ask them to speculate on the reason William Jackson was the target for this boycott notice. They should also consider why women were so important to the boycott of taxable items. Be sure students understand that the organizers of the boycott knew that success depended on securing the support of shoppers, who were predominantly women.
  - c. Try to get them to appreciate the way this plea is almost like a curse on anyone who chooses not to obey. What does that suggest about the way patriots felt about those who were not actively on their side?
5. Pass out **Document C**, Philip Dawes's "A Society of Patriotic Ladies." To fully understand the picture, be sure students read the copy of the manuscript that the women are writing.
- a. Without telling them that Dawes was an English caricaturist, have students speculate about Dawes's attitude toward women who become active in politics.
  - b. Have them describe the appearance of the women and the

## Lesson One

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various things that are happening. Students should understand that the women are in the midst of writing a petition. The picture is based on the women of Edenton, North Carolina, who in 1774 actually drew up, circulated, and signed such a petition. Signing a petition was a conscious and collective political act, never before associated with women. Thus, this action was a dramatic departure from the past and would not be repeated with any regularity until the nineteenth century.

- c. Students might be asked to reflect on the courage and conviction required of people who, like the women of Edenton, are willing to violate powerful social conventions for the sake of ideals. How should society treat such people?

### **A Note to the Teacher:**

Dawes seems more concerned that women are involved in politics, than with their brand of politics. Students should recognize that the women in the picture are depicted as foolish or ugly. The women in the background with long faces and sharp features are probably spinsters, women then regarded as misfits. The cartoon also reveals something of the arrogance and contempt certain sectors of the English population had for Americans. This sense of superiority was a continual irritant for colonists.

## **C. Concluding Activity**

- a. Have students draw cartoons representing the Daughters of Liberty from the perspective of American patriots. They might be drawn holding symbols like flags, torches, swords, or other symbols of wisdom, strength, and courage.
- b. If students would prefer drawing a caricature, have them draw, from the perspective of a patriot or from the perspective of a merchant who continues to stock British made goods. They could draw the British Prime Minister George Grenville bleeding the colonies or King George III being led astray by corrupt ministers.

## “Patriotic Poesy”

(Primary Source)

Copied by Milcah Martha Moore of Philadelphia  
into her commonplace book in 1768.

<p><i>Since the Men from a Party, on fear of a Frown, Are kept by a <u>Sugar-Plumb</u>*, quietly down, <u>Supinely</u>* asleep, and depriv'd of their Sight Are strip'd of their Freedom, and rob'd of their Right. If the Sons (so <u>degenerate</u>*) <u>the Blessing despise</u>*, Let the Daughters of Liberty, nobly arise, And tho' we've <u>no Voice</u>*, but a negative here, The use of the <u>Taxables</u>*, let us <u>forbear</u>*, (Then Merchants import till yr. Stores are all full May the Buyers be few and yr. <u>Traffick be dull</u>*) <u>Stand firmly resolved</u>* and <u>bid Grenville</u>* to see That rather than Freedom, we'll part with our Tea And well as we love the <u>Draught</u>* when adry, As American Patriots, —our Taste we deny.</i></p>	<p>* Candy used as a bribe</p> <p>* Flat on their back</p> <p>* Immoral</p> <p>* hate liberty</p> <p>* Women could not vote</p> <p>* Imports</p> <p>* stop using</p> <p>* Customers be unwilling</p> <p>* Decide</p> <p>* tell Prime Minister</p> <p>* Drink</p>
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### Modern Version of "Patriotic Poesy"

Colonial men are so easily scared of England's disapproval that a piece of candy will keep them quiet.

They will lie down and sleep, giving up their ability to see, their freedom, and their rights.

If the Sons of Liberty have sunk to such an immoral condition that they hate the blessing of liberty, then let the Daughters of Liberty rise and take their place.

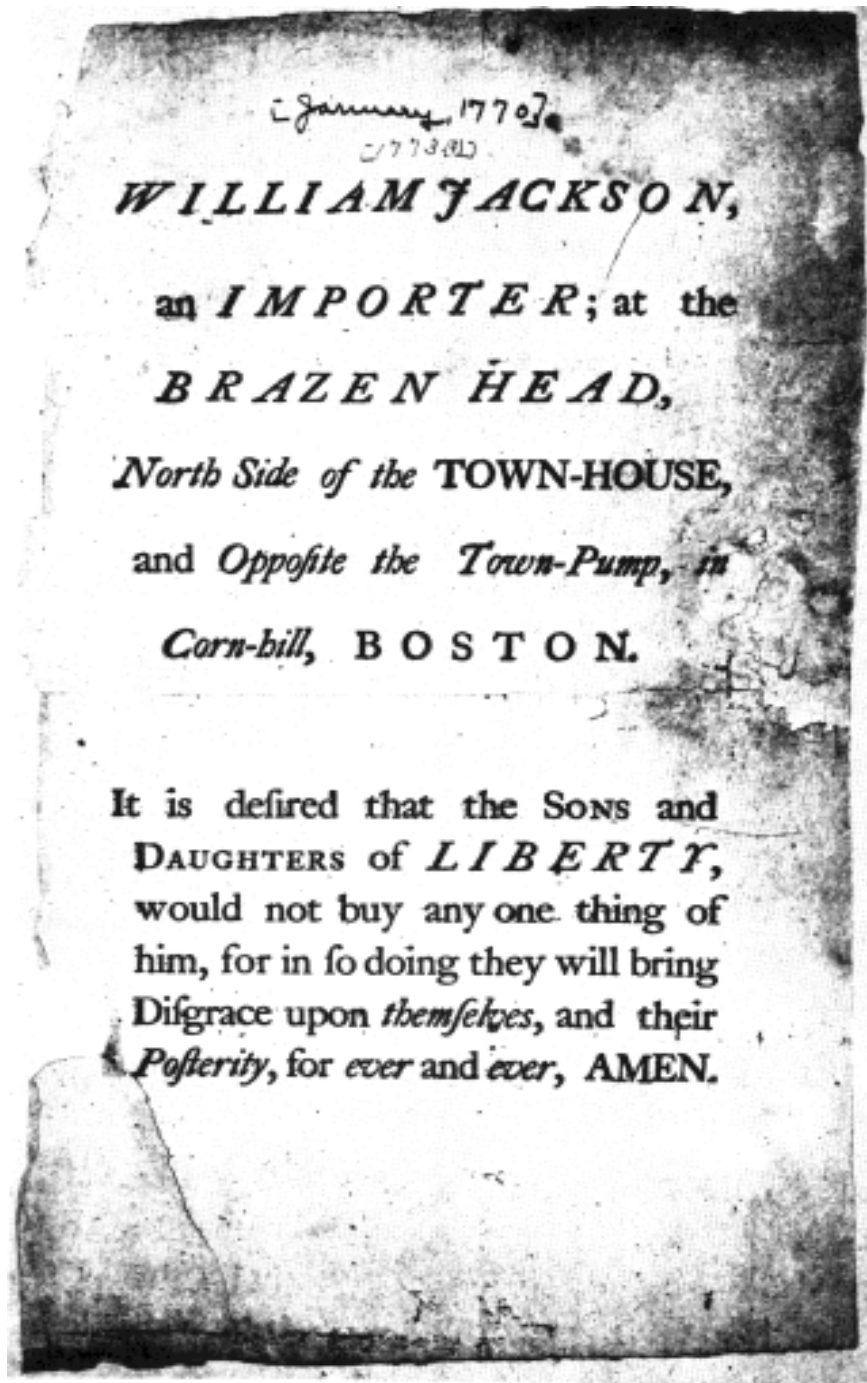
Although women cannot vote or petition, we can do something—stop buying taxable imported goods.

(I hope merchants keep importing goods until their stores are full, and that no one buys anything.)

Be determined and tell Prime Minister Grenville that we will give up tea but not our freedom.

Even though we love to drink tea, when we are thirsty, as American patriots—we won't.

## A Revolutionary Broadside, 1770.



The Library of Congress Prints Division, Washington D.C.

### Philip Dawes' "A Society of Patriotic Ladies," 1775

The petition the ladies in the cartoon are signing says:

"We the Ladys of Edenton do hereby solemnly Engage not to Conform to that Pernicious Custom of Drinking Tea, or that we the above said Ladys will not promote ye wear of any Manufacture from England untill such time that all Acts which tend to Enslave this our Native Country shall be Repealed."



The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.  
LC-USZ62-12711

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## LESSON TWO

### WOMEN IN THE REVOLUTION

#### A. Objectives

- ◆ To understand that war affects whole societies, not just soldiers.
- ◆ To consider some of the ways women participated in the war.
- ◆ To experience how history is written.

#### B. Lesson Activities

1. Ask students what men did during the Revolution. If students know that many men were soldiers, ask them to speculate about who was doing the work normally done by men. Tell them they are going to read a document which will help confirm their suspicions.
2. Have students read **Document D**, an excerpt from Sarah Frazier's *A Reminiscence*, a description of her grandmother's part in the war.
  - a. Discuss the document's reliability and representativeness. The document was written during the early part of the nineteenth century, long after the events described, raising doubts about its accuracy. Moreover, the existence of an iron works suggests that these were people of greater wealth than was typical for yeoman farmers. Despite these reservations, the account seems plausible and conforms with the experiences described in numerous other journals and reminiscences.
  - b. Besides taking over men's occupations this document suggests women were busy with a variety of other activities. Have students list the responsibilities women assumed during the Revolution. They should begin with information obtained in this document, but also have them brainstorm about the kind of support armies require.
  - c. Remind them that this was a war fought on home soil. When armies moved into a region, homes became hospitals, barracks for soldiers, and warehouses for supplies and ammunition.
  - d. The constant interaction between soldiers and civilians allowed many women to become spies.

## Lesson Two

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- e. Women also provided moral support; they often travelled with armies, sharing in soldiers' hardships even as they cooked, cleaned, nursed and comforted the men.
- f. Sometimes wives accompanied their husbands into battle, loading guns and attending the wounded. Even in regions free of combat, women improvised the scarce staples and manufactured goods no longer being brought from England.
- g. Read the **Dramatic Moment** (page 7) to the class. Briefly discuss how women organized and acted when hoarding was suspected. Have them consider the accuracy of this account.
  - If the dialogue is invented, how can they be sure the whole story is not made up?
  - When historians write, where does the record of the past end and the story of the past begin?
  - Another way to put this question is to ask them how free should historians be to interpret the past?

The issue is extremely complex and students cannot be expected to do more than discuss the question. One of the reasons for raising the issue at all is for them to understand how, until quite recently, women could be almost completely excluded from accounts of the Revolution.

- h. After students have finished this list, ask them to speculate about what would have been the patriots' chances for victory without women supplying the resources and support to continue the struggle.
3. Tell students that they are about to have an opportunity to judge the accuracy of one historian's narrative. Pass out copies of the **Dramatic Moment** and **Document E**, two letters describing this event shortly after it occurred.
    - a. Have them read **Document E**. Ask students if either writer was an actual witness. Although it is not entirely clear, John Scollay may have been there, while Abigail Adams was not.
    - b. Next have each student take out red, blue, and black markers. Have them underline those passages of the **Dramatic Moment** in blue which are supported by evidence in the Scollay letter. Passages supported by Adams's letter should be underlined in



red. Some passages may have both colors; many will have none. While students look for evidence to support the **Dramatic Moment**, have them also be sensitive to information which might contradict this account. Have them underline any such passages in black.

- c. When students are finished, briefly discuss the results. How would a historian judge what really happened? For instance, some students might argue that the phrase “sweat glistened on his face” is clearly indicated in Scollay’s assertion that “*Poor Boylston was never so Swetted since he was born.*” Other students might be equally convinced that this statement is a figure of speech. The purpose of this activity is for students to appreciate that the way history is written depends on the writer’s judgment. No account is definitive; all accounts can be revised when new evidence is used or old evidence is reinterpreted.
4. Tell students that some women actively took part in the fighting. Have students read “Molly Pitcher” (**Document F**) and “Deborah Sampson” (**Document G**).
5. Using the following questions as guidelines, discuss these two readings in class. Remind students that the states of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts and the U.S. Congress granted pensions to Corbin, Hays, and Gannett.
  - a. Why are there different versions of the story of Molly Pitcher?
  - b. Are these stories legends or descriptions of actual people and events?
  - c. What evidence do we have that women actually served on the front lines during the Revolution?
  - d. What do these stories tell you about the role women played during the American Revolution?

## Lesson Two

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### C. Concluding Activity

1. Have students use **Document D**, the excerpt of Sarah Frazier's reminiscence of her grandmother to write a play about Mary Frazier's activities during the war. This can either be done collectively as a class activity or can be assigned as an individual writing activity.
2. A grammar lesson explaining the use of quotation marks can be taught in conjunction with this assignment. Students might want to perform their skits for each other or other classes.

**Sarah Frazier's *A Reminiscence*,  
An Account of her Grandmother's Behavior During the Revolution**

Mary Frazier did much to help Washington's army at Valley Forge. Sarah Frazier wrote the following account about her grandmother's actions during the winter of 1777–1778.

. . . day after day collecting from neighbors and friends far and near, whatever they could spare for the comfort of the destitute soldiers, the blankets, and yarn, and half worn clothing thus obtained she brought to her own house, where they would be patched, and darned, and made wearable and comfortable, the stockings newly footed, or new ones knit, adding what clothing she could give of her own. She often sat up half the night, sometimes all, to get clothing ready. Then with it, and whatever could be obtained for food, she would have packed on her horse and set out on her cold lonely journey to the camp which she went to repeatedly during the winter. . . .

All the cloth and linen that my Grandfather wore during the war were spun at home, most of it by [my grandmother's] own hands. All the clothing of the family, (and it was not a small one) during this time was made at home except weaving. All the business of every kind, she attended to Farm, Iron Works, and domestic matters. In Summer as soon as it was light she had her horse saddled, rode over the farm and directed the men about their work, often rode down to the creek, where Sharpless' Iron Works are now, and was back at breakfast time to give her attention and toil to the children, servants, & household affairs.

Reprinted from *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 46 (1922), pp. 55–56.



Valley Forge—Washington & Lafayette. Winter 1777–78.  
Copy of engraving by H. B. Hall after Alonzo Chappel. (National Archives, NWDNS-148-GW-189)

**Two Letters Describing the Action Taken by a Group of Boston  
Women against the Merchant  
Thomas Boylston on 24 July 1777**

1. Excerpt from John Scollay's letter to Samuel Philips Savage, dated 25 July 1777.

Yesterday we had a *high Scene*\* in this town. In the Morning a Number of Women waited on Mr. Boylston. They told him that they kept Little shops to sell Necessarys for Poor People, they understood that he had Coffee to sell and if he would sell it at a reasonable price they would take it of him. He gave them a very short answer and they Left him, about 3 oClock in the afternoon a Number of Women mostly from the North part of the town Assembled under the direction of one Mrs. Colter. They were not your *Maggys* but reputable Clean drest Women Some of them with Silk gownes on. They went to Boylstons Warehouse where they found him. They Insisted on having his Coffee at their price. He refused. They without Ceremony put him into a Cart they having one at hand and drove him some way up the Wharf. He found it Impossible to withstand, gave them his Keys, they took one Cask and Carried it off Intending to pay him for it. Poor Boylston was never so Swetted since he was born. He was verry roughly handled. I am sorry for the Occasion but I cant say I am sorry that he has met with a rebuff. . . .

\* big event

\* common people

We had yesterday a Legal town Meeting. The town agreed to raise by *Subscription*\* 8,000 [pounds] La[wful] Money to put into the hands of a Committee to purchase articles for the Inhabitants to deliver at a Moderate proffit. I hope this method will be of Service.

\* contribution

2. Excerpt from Abigail Adams's letter to John Adams, dated 31 July 1777.

I have nothing new to entertain you with, unless it is an account of *A New Set of Mobility*\* which have lately taken the Lead in B[osto]n. You must know that there is a great Scarcity of Sugar and Coffe, articles which the Female part of the State are very loth to give up, expecially whilst they consider the Scarcity occasiond by the merchants having *secreted*\* a large Quantity. There has been much rout and Noise in the Town for several weeks. Some Stores had been open'd by a number of people and the Coffe and Sugar carried into the Market and dealt out by pounds. It was rumour'd that an *eminent*\*, wealthy, stingy Merchant (who is a Batchelor) had a *Hogshead*\* of Coffe in his Store which he refused to sell to the committee under 6 shillings per pound. A Number of Females some say a hundred, some say more assembled with a cart and trucks, march'd down to the Ware House and demanded the keys, which he refused to deliver, upon which one of them seiz'd him by his Neck and toss'd him into the cart. Upon his finding no *Quarter*\* he deliver'd the keys, when they tip'd up the cart and discharg'd him, then open'd the Warehouse, Hoisted out the Coffe themselves, put it into the trucks and drove off.

\* a new class of people

\* hidden

\* well known

\* large barrel

\* protection

It was reported that he had a Spanking among them, but this I believe was not true. A large concourse of Men stood amaz'd silent Spectators of the whole transaction.

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### Molly Pitcher

During the Revolution wives joined their husbands in the army as camp followers. Camp followers were given certain duties with the army and often played a role during a battle. Usually they carried water to clean out the cannon barrel after each firing or tended the wounded. Molly Pitcher was one of these camp followers. No one knows for sure who Molly Pitcher actually was; some believe her to have been Margaret Corbin while others say she was Mary Ludwig Hays. Both Margaret Corbin and Mary Ludwig Hays were typical of many other women who became involved in battles when their husbands had been wounded or killed.

#### The Story of Margaret Corbin

Margaret was born in Pennsylvania in 1751 and raised by her uncle after her father was killed and her mother captured by Indians. In 1772 Margaret married John Corbin and when her husband enlisted as a private in the army during the Revolutionary War, Margaret went with him as a camp follower. In November 1776, during the defense of Fort Washington on Manhattan Island, her husband, stationed at a cannon near the front lines of battle, was killed. Margaret immediately assumed his place and helped fire the cannon until she was seriously wounded. Although she recovered she remained an invalid for the rest of her life. After the war she received a small pension from Congress for her service. She was known to her neighbors as "Captain Molly."

#### The Story of Mary Ludwig Hays

Little is known about Mary's early life other than she was the daughter of a dairy farmer. She married John Casper Hays who enlisted in Pennsylvania as a gunner in the artillery soon after the war began. Mary went along as a camp follower. During the Battle of Monmouth Court House, June 28, 1778, Mary hauled pitchers of water to the soldiers at their battle positions. During one of the trips to the front lines with her pails of water, she found her husband lying on the ground wounded. Mary took his place and loaded the cannon during the rest of the battle.

Another story told by an eyewitness says that Mary worked with her husband helping fire the cannon during the entire course of the battle. The eyewitness wrote:

A woman whose husband belonged to the artillery and who was then attached to a piece [cannon] in the engagement, attended with her husband at the piece the whole time. While in the act of reaching [for] a cartridge and having one of her feet as far before the other as she could step, a cannon shot from the enemy passed directly between her legs without doing any other damage than carrying away all the lower part of her petticoat. . . .

Source: Linda Grant DePauw, *Founding Mothers: Women of America in the Revolutionary Era* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), pp. 189–91.

Mary showed no concern for her safety and continued to help her husband with firing the cannon.

Despite what actually happened, Mary was awarded a pension in 1822 by the Pennsylvania legislature for her service in the Revolutionary War.



Molly Pitcher at the Battle of Monmouth. June 1778.

Copy of engraving by J. C. Armytage after Alonzo Chappel. (National Archives, NWDNS-148-GW-923)

### Deborah Sampson

Some women disguised themselves as men and enlisted receiving full pay and rations. No one know how many women served in this way , but only a few were actually discovered. A Massachusetts woman joined the service under the name Samuel Gay and was promoted to the rank of sergeant before she was discovered and discharged. Another, Sally St. Clair, was only discovered after she had been killed in battle. Deborah Sampson Gannett, however, is the best known woman who served as a combat soldier in the Revolution.

At the age of ten Deborah Sampson went to work as a house servant. While working as a servant she attended school and got enough education to become a teacher. She taught for a short time before deciding to enlist in the Massachusetts militia from 1781 to 1783 under the name of Robert Shurtleff. She served in a number of battles and marched with her militia from New York to Yorktown in 1781. In 1783, at Tarrytown, New York, Deborah mounted a horse and, with her fellow soldiers, pursued the British to a swamp.

The rushed on them on the right and the left. . . . The dauntless Fair [Deborah], at this instant, thought she felt something warmer than sweat run down her neck. Putting her hand to the place, she found the blood gushed from the left side of her head very freely. She said nothing; as she thought it no time to tell of wounds, unless mortal. . . . She dismounted, but had not strength to walk, or stand alone. She found her boot on her right leg filled with blood; and in her thigh . . . she found the incision of a ball, when it issued. . . .

She told one of the sergeants, she was wounded, [but] she chose rather to be left in that horrid place, than be carried any further. They all, as one, concluded to carry her, in case she could not ride. Here was her trial! A thousand thoughts . . . at once darted before her. She had always thought she should rather die, than disclose her sex to the army! And at that instant, almost in despair, she drew a pistol from a holster, and was nearly ready to execute the fatal deed. But divine goodness here stayed her hand; and the shocking act and idea of suicide were soon banished by her cooler reason. . . .



Somehow, she managed to keep her identity hidden even as the doctor treated her wounds. Returning to her unit, she came down with a severe fever and this time was discovered by a doctor attending her. She was dismissed from the service.

After the war Deborah married Benjamin Gannett and in 1797 she went on a speaking tour telling the story of how she had served as a soldier during the war. She received pensions from both the State of Massachusetts and the United States Congress for her service during the Revolution. After her death, Congress granted Benjamin Gannett a pension as the widower of A Revolutionary War soldier.

Source: Herman Mann, *The Female Review: or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady Whose Life and Character are Peculiarly Distinguished—Being a Continental Soldier . . .* (Dedham, MA: Nathaniel and Benjamin Heaton, 1797), pp. 173–74,

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## Lesson Three

### Remember the Ladies

#### A. Objectives

- ◆ To learn the sense in which the Revolution was truly revolutionary and to understand its limitations.
- ◆ To understand that many eighteenth-century women recognized and resented their lack of legal and political autonomy.
- ◆ To consider why despite women's contributions, they failed to achieve legal and political rights.

#### B. Lesson Activities

##### Teacher Instructions

Before proceeding, students should become familiar with the vocabulary necessary to comprehend the readings. The effectiveness of this lesson depends largely on the students' ability to understand the extraordinary content and playful, but earnest, tone of these letters. Students can only achieve such a sophisticated appreciation of content and style if these documents can be easily read. While brief definitions of difficult vocabulary are provided on the document sheets, separating the vocabulary instruction from the history lesson will help avoid alienating students from the readings. Consequently, we recommend a separate lesson on vocabulary, perhaps as a language lesson on synonyms.

1. Ask students why the Revolutionary War is sometimes called the War of Independence. This question will undoubtedly befuddle them so ask them the difference between a revolution and a struggle for independence. Students should know that Americans wanted independence from England. If independence was the only achievement, why is the war typically called the Revolution? When America broke with England more than independence was achieved. Ask students what was revolutionary in the nation's founding. This lesson should help students realize that in significant ways the Revolution transformed American social alignments.

### A Note to the Teacher

Ordinary people of the middle and lower social ranks joined this struggle in the hope that they could assume larger, more active, social roles. Prior to the Revolution only free white males of property were allowed to vote. Leaders were not drawn from all social ranks, but from a small elite which comprised a colonial aristocracy. As the movement for independence grew, ordinary people became convinced that independence could also mean a more open, egalitarian society. Many joined the struggle for independence to gain social autonomy and a role in political decision making. Students should be able to get a sense of the social transformation of America from Abigail Adams's letter to her husband John Adams.

2. Tell the class that they are about to read some private letters between one of America's most famous couples. John Adams, a Massachusetts lawyer and the first Vice-President. He became the second President in 1797. His wife Abigail, one of the country's most prominent women, maintained a lively correspondence with many influential people of her time. One of their sons, John Quincy Adams, became the sixth President and many of their descendants became important public figures.
3. Pass out **Document H**, excerpts from three letters exchanged between Abigail and John Adams. Have students note and discuss when the letters were written. If necessary, remind them that the Declaration of Independence was not written until July 1776. This should help students understand the climate of optimism, possibility, and social change that suffused this time.
  - a. Have students read and discuss the document in small groups. To ensure that discussion is focused, have students use **Worksheet 1** which contains sample questions for use as a guide. Sometimes it is useful to assign each group a different set of questions. After the groups have considered their responses among themselves they can report their findings to the class.
  - b. Have a brief class discussion on a few of the central issues. Be sure students understand how these letters reveal the volatility of the period. They may not appreciate the almost poignant wistfulness of Abigail's humor, but they can understand that she is simultaneously joking and serious. When John dismisses her suggestion, she responds playfully. As a bright woman sensitive to the tenor of her times she recognized the limits of social change

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people would tolerate. In part, her resignation was made easier by the quality of her marriage and her rather lofty social position. Through these letters the class should be able to understand that our Revolution was a contained one.

### A Note to the Teacher

The unique, and justly celebrated, feature of our nation is that it rests on the consent of the governed. For a brief period at our nation's founding, the words "All men are created equal" could have been interpreted as broadly as possible. Even before the war was begun there were people in America working to abolish slavery. In New Jersey women were allowed to vote from the time of the Revolution until 1807. But the hopes that propelled many people to join the struggle went unfulfilled. As a result of the Revolution more people than ever before were allowed to participate actively in government, and in several states people no longer had to have property in order to vote. But the vote was still for male citizens. Only through the struggles of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did the words of our founding achieve their broad and inclusive meaning.

4. To help students understand why women were excluded from the political rights they had done so much to win, have them read **Document I**, an excerpt from Elizabeth Drinker's diary. Elizabeth Drinker was a bright, well-educated Quaker. Her diary reveals that like many women of her time she would have enjoyed greater freedom and more opportunity to exercise her abilities. But as the students will read, she was uncomfortable with the notion of full social equality between men and women. That a woman like Elizabeth Drinker had reservations about women's independence suggests that others were even more reluctant, particularly men, who in allowing expanded roles for women would have lost power. Have students consider the power of social conventions. Often people persist in behavior because culture promotes certain habits and beliefs. For instance, it is well known that there are numerous economic and social reasons for paying off credit card balances, but some people in America continue to spend far beyond their means.

### C. Concluding Activity

Have students imagine that they are adults in 1776 and then debate whether women should be given their political rights. However, to make the debate more interesting, have them also imagine they are of the opposite gender. Avoid having the two sides of the debate drawn along gender lines. Some males, like Tom Paine, were very much in favor of political rights for women.

#### Extended Art Activity

As an alternate activity, pairs of students can make silhouettes of one another after the fashion of Elizabeth Drinker's. In one corner of the room, use a slide projector or other bright directed light source to shine a bright light on a wall. One student should sit horizontally to the light and next to a wall, while the other student traces the student's silhouette on a piece of white paper taped to the wall. When everyone has a silhouette on white paper, the project can be finished as a class. Everyone can cut out their own image, trace it on black paper, then cut out this new image, and mount it on white paper.



**Excerpts from Letters Between  
Abigail and John Adams  
Regarding Women's Enfranchisement, 1776**

Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776

. . . I long to hear that you have declared *an independancy*\*—and by the way in the Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hand of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be *tyrants*\* if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to *foment*\* a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves *bound*\* by any Laws in which we have *no voice*\*\* , or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no *dispute*\*, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the *harsh*\* title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the *vicious*\* and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with *impunity*\*. Men of Sense in all Ages *abhor*\*\* those customs which treat us only as the *vassals*\* of your Sex.

\* American independence from England

\* dictators, demanding without mercy

\* cause

\* required to obey

\*\* no say in making laws

\* argument

\* cruel, heartless

\* wicked, criminal

\* freedom from punishment

\*\* hate;

\* subordinants

John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776

. . . As to your *extraordinary*\* Code of Laws, I cannot but Laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the *bands*\* of Government every where. That Children and *Apprentices*\* were disobedient—that schools and Colledges were grown *turbulent*\*—that Indians *slighted*\*\* their Guardians and Negroes grew *insolent*† to their Masters. But your Letter was the first *Intimation*\* that another Tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown discontented.—This is rather too coarse a Compliment but you are so *saucy*\*, I wont blot it out.

Depend upon it, we know better than to repeal our Masculine systems. Altho they are in full force [in the law], you know they are little more than theory. We dare not exert our power in its full *latitude*\*. We are obliged to go fair and softly, and in practice you know **w**e are the subjects. We have only the name of masters, and rather than give this up, which would completely subject us to the *despotism*\* of the petticoat, I hope General Washington and all our brave heroes would fight.

\* amazing  
 \* control  
 \* youths learning a trade  
 \* disordered  
 \*\* disobeyed  
 † rude  
 \* hint  
 \* sassy; bold but rude

\* extent

\* absolute power



Abigail Adams

Library of Congress LC-USZ62-10016 DLC

Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 7, 1776

I can not say that I think you very generous to the Ladies, for *whilst*\* you are *proclaiming*\*\* peace and good will to Men, *Emancipating*<sup>†</sup> all Nations, you insist upon *retaining*<sup>§</sup> an *absolute*\* power over Wives. But you must remember that *Arbitrary*\*\* power is like most other things which are very *hard*<sup>1</sup>, very *liable*<sup>2</sup> to be broken—and notwithstanding all your wise Laws and *Maxims*\* we have it in our power not only to free ourselves but to *subdue*\* our Masters, and without violence throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet—

“Charm by accepting, by submitting *sway*\*  
Yet *have our Humour*\* most when we obey.”

\* while; \*\*shouting out  
† freeing  
§ keeping; \* complete  
\*\* unreasonable  
<sup>1</sup>unfair  
<sup>2</sup>likely  
\* sayings  
\* conquer, control

\* persuade  
\* have our way; get  
what we want

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John Adams, lithograph after a painting by John Singleton Copley

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-1909 DLC



## Discussion Questions for the Adams Correspondence

Questions for the first letter from Abigail:

1. Does Abigail sound eager for American independence?
2. What does she expect independence will require?
3. What does she hope will happen when independence is declared?
4. What is the meaning of "Remember the Ladies?"
5. Why does she accuse her husband's ancestors of being ungenerous?
6. What is she threatening?
7. How does this threat echo America's struggle for independence?
8. What does this suggest about America's struggle?
9. Do you agree that men are by nature cruel and demanding?
10. Does she say all men act in ways which are cruel and demanding?
11. Is this letter a serious plea for women's rights?

Questions for John's response:

1. What does John mean by "your extraordinary Code of Laws"?
2. To whom are women being compared?
3. What do these different groups have in common?
4. What is the struggle for independence causing to happen to society?
5. What does the social turmoil he mentions suggest about the struggle?
6. Is he pleased that different sorts of people are also demanding rights?
7. Is he willing to give women political rights?
8. Is his letter serious?

Questions for Abigail's response:

1. What does she say will happen if women are not given political rights?
2. According to her, how can women subdue men?
3. Is her solution a way to real independence and freedom for women?
4. Why is her solution to the lack of women's rights so faint-hearted?
5. Is she serious in offering this means to dominate men?

### Excerpt from Elizabeth Drinker's Diary

This brief journal entry is Drinker's only comment on Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Like her silhouette, her comment is just an outline—lacking details. Historians are eager to know how ordinary intelligent women, like Drinker, felt about Wollstonecraft's book; unfortunately, finding such evidence is difficult. We do know, however, that printers in Philadelphia and Boston quickly reprinted the book in 1792 and that two years another printer in Philadelphia ran off another 1,500 copies. This indicates that *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was widely read."

Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was first published in 1792. For the time, her book was the most complete and compelling public statement about what women deserve and what they could become. Historians believe that she was expressing the feelings and experiences shared by many women of her time. But historians would like more proof. They would also like to know the extent to which women of the day disagreed with her ideas.

April 22, 1796

I have read a *large octavo volume*\* entitled, *The Rights of Women*, by Mary Wolstonecraft. In very many of her sentiments, she, as some of our friends say, speaks my mind; in some others, I do not altogether *coincide*\* with her. I am not for quite so much independence.

\* a book the size of an 1/8 of a sheet of paper; a "pocket" size book.

\* agree

Elizabeth Drinker, in Henry D. Biddle, ed. *Extracts from the Journal of Elizabeth Drinker, from 1759 to 1807* (Philadelphia, 1889), p. 285



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## LESSON FOUR

### REPUBLICAN MOTHERS

#### A. Objectives

- ◆ To understand the effect of the Revolution on women's lives.
- ◆ To consider the way that human events can have unintended consequences.

#### B. Lesson Activities

Students need to understand the aspirations of women during the American Revolution and the evolutionary changes that occurred in the era following the revolution. You may need to prepare a mini lecture to help students understand the gradual and limited changes that occurred. The paragraphs below can be used for that purpose.

##### Mini Lecture

For many people the anticipated rewards of the Revolution were delayed. Women expected change, but found the spoils of victory divided without appreciable recognition of their roles. This does not mean that there was no alteration in their patterns of living. After the Revolution, the lives of many were irrevocably altered. For some the change was enhanced self-esteem.

While the legal status of women was left largely unaffected by the Revolution, their social status was improved. To help students appreciate this more elusive transformation, ask them how they feel about themselves after they do something difficult which requires perseverance, self-reliance, and skill. This feeling may be analogous to the way women felt about themselves after the Revolution.

Of course, many wanted to support the men in the struggle for independence—in that sense every patriotic woman won. But others were like Abigail Adams and Tom Paine: they saw the war as an opportunity to advance the cause of freedom by incorporating women into the public sphere of politics. These people were disappointed at the lack of legislated change in women's condition.

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The improved status of women led to changes in the way they lived. Because women were perceived as socially important, their intelligence was more fully appreciated. They were considered emotionally sensitive and highly moral. The concept of virtue, which had always been considered to be a masculine trait, became associated with women. While these revised views of women did not lead to immediate changes in their legal condition, changes were occurring in the way women lived. Women were allowed a greater role in choosing their husbands. Responsibility for taking care of the home and raising children was acknowledged to be theirs. Women in the past may have had these duties, but they were theoretically under the guidance of their husbands—now they were their own supervisors. Finally, and for the long-range condition of women perhaps most importantly, women’s opportunities for education greatly improved through the establishment of many female schools. As Republican Mothers, a term frequently used in the first years of the nation to describe women, they were responsible for educating and providing moral training for their children. The recognition that a well-run democratic society depends on an educated and intelligent citizenry meant that the primary educators would themselves need education. While improved opportunities for education was not a conscious goal of women during the Revolution, it was an unintended but beneficial consequence of the Revolution.

1. Ask students what women wanted for themselves from the Revolution.
2. Divide the class into discussion groups, pass out **Document J1**, an essay by Judith Sargent Murray published in 1798 that shows one of the arguments used to justify giving women an education and allowing them independent lives, or **Document J2**, a modern translation. Have students read the document.
  - a. Some of the questions that can guide their discussion include:
    - What does this article claim that most women want to become?
    - According to this essay how are unmarried women regarded?
    - How does Murray feel about this?
    - Why do you suppose she feels this way?
    - What does Murray want to do?

- If women are given the kind of education she proposes, what does she claim will happen?
  - Why does she think girls will be happier if they are independent?
  - Does this mean that she does not want girls ever to marry?
- b. Briefly go over the major points of discussion as a class. Students should understand that by arguing for the right to better education and the right of women to live independent lives, free of the necessity of marriage, Murray was helping to set the conditions that would prepare women to organize for political rights in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
3. To make this point more vividly, pass out **Document K**, the frontispiece from the *Columbian Magazine*, or *Monthly Miscellany*, 1787.
- a. Before explaining who the two women symbolize, have students study the picture and hypothesize about its significance. The inscription is an important hint, but be sure they consider the picture's details and reflect on its mood.
  - b. The woman wearing the scarf with stars is Columbia, the symbol of the United States. The woman beside the pedestal is Wisdom. Note that Wisdom's hand is outstretched to welcome the children led by Columbia. The ships, and farmer plowing, suggest America's abundance and represent the predominant forms of America's prosperity, trade and agriculture. Note the openness and tranquillity of the landscape, which may represent the open possibilities of this new nation.
  - c. Ask students why Columbia is leading children and not adults. Most significantly, one of the children is female. Students may see nothing remarkable in having a girl included in the picture. It may be necessary to explain that for most of the eighteenth-century, girls were seldom given formal educations. Moreover, by including a girl, the picture suggests that the future of America depends as much on women as on men.
  - d. Finally, see if students understand that the inscription has two interpretations. "*Independence the reward of Wisdom, Fortitude,*

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*and Perseverance*” refers to both the newly won independence of the United States and the independence of individuals, who through wisdom, fortitude, and perseverance can control their own lives. The inclusion of a girl in a picture that prescribes the way to achieve individual independence is a sign that the way people thought about women was beginning to change.

- e. Students might want to discuss whether or not they share the confidence evidenced by these documents in the possibilities of education.

### C. Concluding Activities

- 1) Have students read **Document L**, “The Freedom of Election,” one stanza of a poem printed in 1797 in a Newark, New Jersey, newspaper. (A modern version of the poem is also provided.) Tell students that the New Jersey constitution, adopted in 1776, two days before the Declaration of Independence, stated that “All inhabitants of this Colony, of full age, who are worth fifty pounds proclamation money, clear estate in the same and have resided within the county in which they claim their vote, for twelve months immediately preceding the election, shall be entitled to vote. . . .” So that there would be no question about the rights of women who owned property to vote, the legislature passed an election law in 1790 that referred to voters as “he or she.” Women went to the polls to vote in elections throughout the state until the law was changed in 1807 to read that the right to vote could only be exercised by “free, white, male citizens.” Many in New Jersey felt that the 1790 election law encouraged fraud by having men direct women how to vote. Ask students if they think the New Jersey election law carried out the principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence. How do they think the women of New Jersey responded when the election law was changed in 1807 denying them the right to vote?
- 2) Conclude the lesson with a class discussion on what changes the Revolution had on the rights of women. Do you think most women were happy to accept the role of “Republican Mothers?” Why or why not?

**D. Extension Activity**

For most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a principal medium for women's creative expression was needlework. Although this work could be tedious, designs required talent and the stitchery required skill and patience. Have students experience both aspects of this craft by allowing them to cross stitch a picture of their own design. Using graph paper, have them lightly sketch a line drawing. When their designs are complete, have them use crayons, markers, or colored pencils to fill their design. But rather than simply coloring their pictures, have them make "x"s of the appropriate colors in the graph paper squares. If students want to be authentic every square should have an "x" of some color. To keep tedium to a minimum and to ensure that students have a chance to finish their pictures in a reasonable length of time, give them small pieces of paper and urge them to keep their designs simple.

**Excerpts from Judith Sargent Murray's  
*The Gleaner***

. . . Our girls, in general, are bred up with one particular view, with one monopolizing consideration, which seems to absorb every other plan that reason might point out as worthy their attention: An establishment by marriage; this is the goal to which they are constantly pointed, the great *ultimatum*\* of every arrangement: An old maid, they are from infancy taught, at least indirectly, to consider as a *contemptible*\* being; and they have no other means of advancing themselves but in the matrimonial line. . . .

\* *final end*

\* *worthy of scorn*

I would give my daughters every accomplishment which I thought proper; and, to crown all, I would early accustom them to habits of *industry and order*\*: They should be taught with *precision the art economical*\*; they should be enabled to procure for themselves the necessaries of life; independence should be placed within their grasp; and I would teach them "*to reverence themselves*."

\* *work hard, plan carefully*

\* *how to earn a living*

\* *respect themselves*

Marriage should not be represented as . . . a certain, or even necessary event; they should learn to respect a single life, and even to regard it as the most eligible, except a warm, mutual and *judicious* attachment had gained the *ascendancy in the bosom*.

\* *wise, good*

\* *grown in the heart*

If they were thus qualified to administer by their own efforts, to their own wants, the probability is, that impressions of this nature, would frequently prevent *precipitation*, and call into exercise that deliberation which ought, upon all occasions, to be the *concomitant* of every important step.

\* *hurried decision*

\* *companion*

. . . I would have the fair minds of young women occupied by schemes of enjoyment, and by modes of living which, depending principally upon themselves and their natural connexions, would involve a greater probability of *fruition*.

\* *being fulfilled*

Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner*, Vol. I (Boston: I. Thomas & E. T. Andrews, 1798), pp. 166–167.



**Modern Version of  
Excerpts from Judith Sargent Murray's  
*The Gleaner***

Our girls, in general, are raised with one goal, which seems to take over every other plan they might consider: to get married. Marriage is the goal to which girls are constantly pointed, the final end of all their plans. Girls are taught as babies that an old maid [an unmarried woman] is the worst thing in the world and that marriage is the only way to live well.

I would teach my daughters every skill which I thought good and useful. Most importantly, I would teach them early how to work hard and plan carefully. I would teach them about money and earning a living so that they could live independently. I would teach them *to love and respect themselves*.

Marriage should not be considered the only choice for women. A girl should learn to prefer a single and independent life, unless she actually falls in love with a good person who returns her love.

If women were taught to be independent, they would make more careful decisions, including whom to marry.

I would like the fair minds of young women to be busy learning to enjoy life and earn a living. By depending on themselves, they would be much more likely to be happy.

Frontispiece from *Columbian Magazine, or  
Monthly Miscellany, 1787*



The inscription reads, "Independence the reward of Wisdom,  
Fortitude, and Perseverance."

The Library of Congress

**“The Freedom of Election”**

What we read, in days of yore,  
the woman’s occupation,  
Was to direct the wheel and loom  
Not to direct the nation.  
This narrow minded policy  
by us hath met detection;  
While woman’s bound, man can’t be free,  
nor have a fair election.

Linda Grant De Pauw, *Founding Mothers: Women of American in the Revolutionary Era* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), p. 200

**“The Freedom of Election”**

A Modern Version

What we read in days gone by  
women’s work  
Was in the home to make cloths,  
Not to be involved with running the nation.  
We understand that this is a  
narrow-minded policy;  
While women are held back, man cannot be free,  
nor have a fair election.

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This short account of women in the American Revolution is interspersed with letters, diary entries, poetry, and eyewitness accounts.

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The author uses excerpts from diaries, newspapers, and books written during the era to construct an account of women, from all walks of life, who supported the Revolution either by running farms and businesses, providing supplies, or with active participation in the military.

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Kerber describes women's participation in the Revolution and their legal and social status in the new nation. This is excellent background reading for teachers.

———. *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

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Mayer's detailed history, recommended for teacher background reading, focuses on the "forgotten revolutionaries," both men and women, who served the Continental Army as camp followers.

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The author provides a detailed account of women's participation in the American Revolution from their leadership roles in promoting boycotts against British goods through independence. Recommended as teacher background reading.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

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Salmon, Marylynn. *The Limits of Independence: American Women, 1760–1800*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

This book is volume 3 in the “Young Oxford History of Women in the United States” series. Students seeking extra reading will enjoy this highly readable book, which is filled with excellent visual material.