

## WOMEN AND GENDER ROLES IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

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The rhetoric of the American Revolution challenged traditional views on liberty and civil rights and produced new types of thinkers like Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin. They raised questions about the rights of men, the ideal form of government, and a variety of other topics. Though a feminist movement would not begin in earnest until the Seneca Falls convention of 1848, the political climate of the Revolution and early American Republic inevitably dealt with gender issues.<sup>1</sup> From concepts such as Republican motherhood<sup>2</sup> to a brief flirtation with women's suffrage in New Jersey, Americans were questioning and experimenting with ideas regarding the rights and roles of women in the fledgling country, which itself was an experiment. At first glance some of these discussions might appear to be historically premature, since the feminist movement did not develop until much later and under quite different circumstances. However, they were part of the revolutionary currents and thought of the time period. Even as the Revolution opened up questions of the natural rights of man and racial equality, the question of gender, too, could not be ignored.

Historian Mary Beth Norton argues in *Liberty's Daughters* that the Revolutionary War forced women into the realm of politics and transformed their perception of their role in society. "Abigail Adams," she writes, "is a case in point":

In June 1776, she still adhered to the conventional formula, telling John, "I can serve my partner, my family and myself, and enjoy the Satisfaction of your serving your Country," thereby indicating that she believed her contributions to the patriots' cause had to be filtered through the medium of her husband. But less than two years later, in February 1778, she described her "satisfaction in the Consciousness of having discharged *my* duty to the publick." Like others of her contemporaries, she no longer drew a sharp dividing line between the feminine sphere and the masculine realm of public responsibilities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> While "sex" refers to the inherent biological difference between men and women, "gender" refers to the different social roles played by each sex. The roles are not defined by the biological differences; rather society creates separate realms for men and women, thus defining their gender roles.

<sup>2</sup> Term created by Linda Kerber in her essay "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28: no. 2 (Summer 1976): 187. She writes, "The republican ideology that America developed included—hesitantly—a political role for women. It made use of the classic formulation of the Spartan Mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the *polis*. It provided an apparent integration of domestic and political behavior."

<sup>3</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 297.

Nevertheless Norton's conclusion is an ambiguous one. "Republican womanhood eventually became Victorian womanhood," she declares, "but at the same time the egalitarian rhetoric of the Revolution provided the women's rights movement with its earliest vocabulary, and the republican academies produced its first leaders."<sup>4</sup> It is important to understand this paradoxical relationship produced by the Revolution.

Abigail Adams is often seen as the model for radical feminists of the era. She and her husband, John, also demonstrate how family structures and relationships could change. Not only was Abigail an intelligent and articulate woman willing to express her opinions and ideas to her husband, but her husband listened and heeded at times. A mere three weeks after Abigail wrote to her husband suggesting that in forming a new country the leaders should break from the tradition of men having arbitrary power over women (see Document C), he wrote a letter (see Document D) to John Sullivan asking "Whence arises the Right of the Men to govern Women, without their consent. . . . Necessity, you will Say, because there can be no other Rule. But why exclude Women?"<sup>5</sup> These letters are important because they provide a window into the Adamses' relationship as well as an example of some of the contemporary discussions of women's roles.

As important and powerful as this relationship was, it was not typical for the time. A more common relationship was that between Alexander Hamilton and his wife, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton. Hamilton's courtship of Eliza took place in 1780 at the height of the Revolutionary War when he was very much in the middle of the events as George Washington's aide-de-camp. Despite his important role in the events of the day, he rarely discussed them with his soon-to-be wife. In a letter in which politics did come up (Document F), he quickly apologized, writing, "Pardon me my love for talking politics to you. What have we to do with any thing but love? Go the world as it will, in each others arms we cannot but be happy."<sup>6</sup> Letters he wrote during their marriage also followed this theme of avoiding political discussion. A letter written to his close friend John Laurens suggests that Hamilton did not regard Eliza as highly intelligent.<sup>7</sup>

Still, there are instances in which Eliza did play some role in her husband's political career. Washington had asked Hamilton's assistance in composing and editing his Farewell Address, in

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<sup>4</sup> Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 299. "Victorian womanhood" is used in a pejorative sense here. The Victorian era was not a time in which women made gains, but one in which they were very much second-class citizens. Republican academies were schools established to educate women, ensuring their ability to understand contemporary politics.

<sup>5</sup> John Adams to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776, in *The Papers of John Adams*, eds. Robert J. Taylor et al., 14 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977–), 4:208–09.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, September 6, 1780, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, eds. Harold C. Syrett et al., 27 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961–1987), 2:422.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, June 30, 1780, in *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 2:348

which he announced his decision not to run for a third term as president. Eliza reported (Document I) that Hamilton wrote the speech in her presence and read a great deal of it to her “to discover how it sounded upon the ear.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, in this instance she was involved in Hamilton’s political life. While she may have played a greater role, her personal papers have not survived, leaving no clear evidence about her role in Hamilton’s public and political life. This is one example of how women who may otherwise not have been politically active had an increasing presence in the political sphere during this period. Even if Hamilton might have preferred to keep his home life separate from his career, in the politicized times in which he lived, that would have been nearly impossible.

It is also important to note that Hamilton’s ideas on women’s roles were—like so many of his views—far ahead of his times. He had defined vision regarding gender. He saw ahead to a time of industrial growth and imagined an important role for women in such a society. In his *Report on Manufactures* (Document H), he argued that women, as well as children, should be employed in factories. Whether this can be seen as liberating for women is debatable. There are two arguments to this debate. One is the idea that the growth of industry would open up jobs for women, thus allowing them to escape the limitations of the cult of domesticity. On the other hand, industry, it can be argued, would exacerbate the oppression of women because they usually had the lowest paying jobs.

As debates between men like Jefferson and Hamilton unfolded over the nature of the economy, gender roles became an important factor. Just as Jefferson’s vision of an agricultural society with widespread democratic participation differed from Hamilton’s vision of industrialism, so too did Jefferson’s ideas of gender differ from Hamilton’s. The idea of women working in factories conflicted with Jefferson’s ideology and the assumption that a woman’s main role in the forging of a new society would be in the domestic sphere. Women would be responsible for tending the home and educating the children. They needed to be educated and politicized not because they were to be directly involved with politics, but because they would raise the nation’s future leaders and voters.

As some of the most important thinkers of the early Republic were throwing these ideas around, one of the most concrete experiments regarding women’s rights was taking place in New Jersey (see Documents B and C). This is a powerful example of the concrete shifts in gender roles for women in the early Republic. From 1776 to 1807, New Jersey was the only state in the nation to

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, Note on Washington’s Farewell Address, August 7, 1840, in *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 20:172–73.

grant women's suffrage. While other states defined a voter as a "freeman" or "free white man," New Jersey defined a voter as any adult inhabitant "worth fifty pounds."<sup>9</sup> Thus, any woman owning 50 pounds worth of property could vote. As women lost their property rights to their husbands upon marriage, only single women could qualify. Historians Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis argue that "New Jersey women escaped the post-Revolutionary female depoliticization that Mary Beth Norton noted in the rest of the country. Instead, single women's behavior mirrored that of other newly enfranchised groups."<sup>10</sup> In an effort to gain the support of woman voters, Federalists during the post-1789 struggle for power between Federalists and Republicans in New Jersey, Federalists launched a campaign to politicize women. Their rhetoric echoed much of the "natural rights" rhetoric of the Revolution itself. Republicans in their turn, attempted to politicize women and attract their votes a decade later. Eventually support for women's rights eroded in both parties. New Jersey lawmakers passed a law in 1807 making suffrage exclusively a right of propertied men. This experiment in suffrage, while short lived, was part of the contemporary exploration of how widespread government participation was to be.

George Washington, in a letter to a supporter (Document G), acknowledged the importance of women in the Revolution and considered what their future role should be. In essence, this is the goal of the lesson plan: to demonstrate that questions of women's roles were an essential part of the formation of the early Republic. The first two documents are intended to give students concrete examples of how the nation addressed these questions and attempted to answer them. The remaining primary sources demonstrate that indeed these questions were very much on the mind many founding fathers and mothers.

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<sup>9</sup> Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis, "'The Petticoat Electors': Women's Suffrage in New Jersey," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 12 (Summer 1992): 159.

<sup>10</sup> Klinghoffer and Elkis, "'The Petticoat Electors,'" 163.

## LESSON PLAN

### Overview

The class plan explores how questions about gender shaped the early Republic and how gender was shaped by the political climate.

### Pre-Class Assignments

Read Documents A through I, and the opening essay. Write brief responses to the following:

- 1) Compare/contrast the manner in which Abigail Adams, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and George Washington discuss gender and women's roles.
- 2) What is the difference between what these people were saying and the ideology behind Republican motherhood?
- 3) Considering the results, how successful do you think vocal women like Abigail Adams and the advocates for women's suffrage in New Jersey were?

### Discussion Questions

- I. How do we define "gender" versus "sex"? What are examples of decisions or laws based on sex and decisions or laws based on gender roles?
  - Sex is the biological definition of male and female, based solely on anatomy and physical differences. Gender is generally defined as the manner in which society defines the non-biological differences between men and women. An example of gender-defined roles is men being assigned by society to physical labor while women are assigned to domestic roles such as housework and caring for children.
  - Laws are in fact rarely based on sex. Some might argue that laws detailing maternity leaves for pregnant working women are laws based on sex. However, many would argue that gender is an equal or larger part of these laws. An example of a law based on gender roles was the denial of women's suffrage. Though the laws dictated only "men" could vote, and this is a sexual definition, the assumption that women were incapable of understanding politics came from assumptions based in gender roles. This has modern parallels in certain countries in which women are excluded from military service and certain jobs.
- II. To what can we attribute the discussion of women's rights during the Revolution?
  - The political climate of the Revolution forced women to be politically involved in a way they had not been previously. In addition, the discussion of natural rights created a larger discussion of human rights which forced people to consider the rights of slaves and women.
- III. Using the examples of Hamilton and John Adams, how much influence did wives have on their husbands, their careers and politics?
  - In Adams' case, it was quite substantial. This seems to have been the exception to the rule based on Mary Beth Norton's argument. Hamilton's marriage, with the exception of her assistance in drafting Washington's farewell speech, is an example of politics being left out of a marriage.

IV. How can we explain New Jersey's brief experiment in women's suffrage when it was not to happen again for over a century?

- Tied in with question I. The political climate of the time as well as the fact that the unprecedented formation of the Republic forced those making decisions to experiment with a variety of ideas, often radical. In addition, the women in New Jersey briefly enjoyed the support of the Federalists, who hoped that they would be rewarded with votes in exchange for their support.

V. Consider documents F and I. They all discuss the various debates and discussions ongoing as to how women's social roles would be defined. What is the basic principle of Hamilton? How does document I fit into this?

- Hamilton's basic principle is that as the United States progressed towards industrialism, women should and must play a role in the workforce.
- Document I discusses the concept of Republican motherhood. This ideology would not fit at all with Hamilton's ideas. Women in the workforce would inevitably remove them from the domestic roles which were absolutely vital the ideology of Republican Motherhood.

VI. Think about documents H and I comparatively. How might the story told in Document H conflict with the ideology described in document I.

- Document H describes direct participation of women in the political process. They vote, and politicians appeal to them directly. The political participation of the Republican Mother, on the other hand, is indirect. Women raise and care for the boys who will participate directly and are supposed to ensure that men will be knowledgeable enough to participate.

VII. Were the ideas of Alexander Hamilton or the ideology of Republican Motherhood more feminist? In other words, whose ideas were more likely to open up greater opportunity for women and obtaining equal rights with men.

- Hamilton did advocate for women in industrial workforces, thus granting women a type of independence previously unavailable. Hamilton advocated for women to work the most menial and low wage jobs.
- Republican Motherhood gave women two important things. The first was education, which is empowering. The second was a role in the political process. The problem with this role was that it was extremely limited. It confined women to the realm of domesticity, defining their roles in society as domestics. Furthermore, their participation was indirect.

### Post-Class Exercise

Women's suffrage in New Jersey and Alexander Hamilton's vision for women in factories were two unique ideas that did not start to become a reality for the country until at least the latter part of the 19th century. Republican motherhood, on the other hand, was a reality in the early Republic. The role for women was seen as domestic. Political involvement was indirect and factory work was rare.

The definition of gender roles has shifted since the early Republic. Tasks once performed by

men are in some cases performed by women and vice versa. However, in certain instances gender roles have remained fixed since the Revolution. Looking at pictures or advertisements in magazines the students should bring in the three pictures and/or advertisements showing how gender roles for men or women have remained the same, while they should also find three examples of how they have shifted. The student should write a caption for each example detailing how they do or do not demonstrate a change.

## RESOURCES

Chernow, Ron. *Alexander Hamilton*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004.

This book has the most detailed account of Hamilton's relationship with his wife, Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton.

Hoffman, Ronald and Peter J. Albert, ed. *Women in the Age of the American Revolution*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989.

The chapter entitled "Men's Wills and Women's Property Rights in Colonial New York," is useful in gaining insight to women's (particularly wives') roles during this period.

Klinghoffer, Judith Apter, and Lois Elkins. "'The Petticoat Electors': Women's Suffrage in New Jersey, 1776–1807." *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Summer 1992): 159–193.

This offers extensive details of the history of women's suffrage in New Jersey.

Norton, Mary Beth. *Liberty's Daughters*. Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.

This book includes an extensive discussion of Republican ideology and offers conclusions as to how the Revolution changed and shaped women's lives.

Roberts, Cokie. *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation*. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

This book offers a discussion of the role of leading women, such as Abigail Adams and Martha Washington, in the Revolution.

## DOCUMENTS

### Document A

Excerpt from Linda Kerber's article "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective"<sup>11</sup>

*This document describes the ideology of Republican Motherhood. It explains that the concept provided a defined role for women and granted them access to the political sphere, but that it was restrictive. It dictated that women's political role would overlap with their domestic role. Women's gender role was defined in the political realm as the person who would instill politics in the children. (Note the difference between this thinking and that of Hamilton, who foresaw women leaving the domestic realm and entering the industrial workforce.)*

The republican ideology that America developed included—hesitantly—a political role for women. It made use of the classic formulation of the Spartan Mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the *polis*. It provided an apparent integration of domestic and political behavior. . . .

. . . The model republican woman was to be self-reliant (within limits); literate, untempted by the frivolities of fashion. She had a responsibility to the political scene, though not to act on it. . . .

. . . The Republican Mother's life was dedicated to the service of civic virtue; she educated her sons for it; she condemned and corrected her husband's lapses from it. . . . To that end the theorists created a mother who had a political purpose, and argued that her domestic behavior had a direct political function in the republic. . . .

. . . There was a direct relationship between developing egalitarian democracy among men and the expectation of continued deferential behavior among women. Émile needs Sophie;<sup>12</sup> the society in which he functions cannot exist without her. . . . The learned woman, who might very well wish to make choices as well as influence attitudes, was a visible threat to this arrangement. A political community that accepted women as political actors would have to eliminate the Rousseauian assumption that the world in which women live is separate from the empire of men. The political traditions on which American politics were built offered little assistance in defining the point at which the woman's private domain intersected with the public one. The Republican Mother seemed to offer a solution. . . .

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<sup>11</sup> Kerber, "The Republican Mother," 187–205.

<sup>12</sup> Reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762).

. . . Republican Motherhood was a very important—even revolutionary—invention. It altered the female domain in which most women had always lived out their lives; it justified an extension of women’s absorption and participation in the civic culture. . . .

. . . But the ideology of Republican Motherhood had limitations; it provided a context in which skeptics could easily maintain that women should be content to perform this limited political role permanently and ought not to wish fuller participation. For one woman, Republican Motherhood might mean an extension of vistas; for another it could be stifling. The ambivalent relationship between motherhood and citizenship would be one of the most lasting, and most paradoxical, legacies of the revolutionary generation.

### Document B

Excerpt from Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis’s article “‘The Petticoat Electors’: Women’s Suffrage in New Jersey.”<sup>13</sup>

*This article describes the brief period between 1776 and 1807 when New Jersey granted women suffrage. It shows that no governmental error caused this, but rather debate and consideration by both parties. It was part of the larger debate during the time period about what rights would be extended to various people in the formation of the Republic.*

The facts are rather straightforward. In 1776, New Jersey adopted a constitution that ignored gender barriers in its suffrage clause. Other states’ constitutions drafted that year defined voters as “freeman” (Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina), “man” (Vermont), “white male inhabitants” (Georgia), or “free white man” (South Carolina). New Jersey defined voters as adult inhabitants “worth fifty pounds” who resided in the state for one year. As married women’s property ownership was invariably limited, however, only single women could vote. From 1776 to 1807, women routinely participated in the state’s electoral process. In 1807, the state legislature “reinterpreted” the constitution’s suffrage clause and passed an election law that redefined voters solely as adult white male taxpaying citizens. . . .

Women, along with others, lost the franchise when the state’s ruling elite concluded that their vote represented a political liability rather than a political asset. . . .

New Jersey’s 1776 Constitutional franchise clause, which permitted single adult women to participate in state elections, was thoroughly debated and purposefully written. . . .

When the war was over, New Jersey women escaped the post-Revolutionary female

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<sup>13</sup> Klinghoffer and Elkis, “‘The Petticoat Electors,’” 159–193.

depoliticization that Mary Beth Norton noted in the rest of the country. Instead, single women's behavior mirrored that of other newly enfranchised voting groups. It depended on local community standards, the ideological milieu and, most importantly, political party rivalry. Female political activity, which subsided immediately after the war, reemerged in 1789 with the birth of the Federalist party and reached its peak between 1797 and 1807 as the result of intense struggle between Federalists and Republicans. During this period, both political parties actively campaigned for women's votes and women, in their turn, contributed to the political debate. . . .

[T]he passage of an election law in 1790 . . . reflected the Federalist gentry's need to widen their political base. The law was designed to enhance Federalist power in the legislature and therefore applied only to the state's seven most Federalist counties. It instituted township voting that greatly increased the accessibility of the polls and referred to voters as "he or she." The clarification that elicited no public comment either before or after its inclusion in law was probably intended to enhance propertied female participation in the political process. . . . Women with husbands could not vote, but those without husbands certainly could and did. . . . Suddenly, in a manner reminiscent of the revolutionary period, Federalists began emphasizing the suitability and desirability of female political participation. . . .

The Federalist campaign to politicize women culminated in 1793 in a Fourth of July oration rendered by one of New Jersey's leading citizens and Alexander Hamilton's closest friend and ally, Elias Boudinot. . . . Alluding to the role women played in the state's public affairs, Boudinot asked his female audience, "Have you not at all times, and do you not still continue to participate deeply in the multiplied blessing of our common country?" . . .

Federalists were the first to conclude erroneously that women's suffrage was bound to benefit the Republicans. . . . Thus, operating on the basis of the dubious assumption that female suffrage was sure to benefit the opposition, Federalists changed their position and began to advocate female disfranchisement as a part of major electoral reform. . . .

Republicans, in their turn, tried to appeal to New Jersey's female voters by an open advocacy of the equality of women. . . .

Unfortunately, the Jeffersonian-Republican honeymoon with female suffrage was as short-lived as the Federalist had been. . . .

New Jersey women, victims or correspondents, were demoted for over a hundred years to the conditions of "slaves, considered as complete vassals, who had no voice to utter in choosing their rulers." Predictably, ideology went hand in hand with policy. Women lost not only their right

to participate in the political process, but also their image as virtuous individuals with “a heart light as cork, and a mind free as air.” . . .

Thus, along with the right of suffrage for single women, all New Jersey women lost the right to be treated with the respect accorded to a free citizen of the Republic. . . .

The growth of gender ideology was not the reason for the disfranchisement of women. Power politics was . . . [W]omen lost the vote because they tended to vote for the wrong party. . . . This does not mean that social and ideological frames of reference were unimportant. They were useful in providing the excuse for cancelling single women’s right to vote. . . . The story of female suffrage in New Jersey, however, shows that these frames of reference were flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of gender relations. . . .

[A]s Linda Kerber noted, “restricting women’s politicization was one of a series of conservative choices that Americans made in the postwar years as they avoided the full implication of their own revolutionary radicalism.” The exclusion of blacks and aliens can be viewed in the same light.

### Document C

Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 7, 1776<sup>14</sup>

*In the passage below, excerpted from a letter, Abigail Adams implores her husband, John, and other revolutionary leaders to consider the rights of women in forming the new nation’s government. She suggests that a husband’s power over a woman is not a natural right, but an arbitrary, socially constructed one; one that women have the power to break.*

A government of more stability is much wanted in this colony, and they are ready to receive ~~them~~ it from the Hands of the Congress, and since I have begun with Maxims of State I will add another viz. that a people may let a king fall, yet still remain a people, but, if a king let his people slip from him, he is no longer a king. And as this is most certainly our case, why not proclaim it to the World in decisive terms your own importance?

Shall we not be despiced by foreign powers, for hesitateing so long at a word?

I can not say that I think you are very generous to the Ladies, for whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to Men, Emancipating all Nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power

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<sup>14</sup> Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 7, 1776, in *Letters of Mrs. John Adams, the Wife of John Adams*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, Mass.: Little and Brown, 1841), 75–76; also published online in *The Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/cfm/doc.cfm?id=L17760507aa>.

over Wives. But you must remember that Arbitrary power is like most other things which are very hard, very liable 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.

### Document D

John Adams to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776<sup>15</sup>

*In this excerpt from a letter, Adams responds to ideas and questions brought up by Sullivan regarding the formation of a new nation. He addresses women's rights. While his tone cannot be interpreted as anything but ambiguous, it is important to note that he is addressing questions about women's rights a mere three weeks after Abigail's correspondence with him on the issue.*

It is certain in Theory, that the only moral Foundation of Government is the Consent of the People. But to what an Extent Shall We carry this Principle? Shall We Say, that every Individual of the Community, old and young, male and female, as well as rich and poor, must consent, expressly to every Act of Legislation? No, you will Say. This is impossible. How then does the Right arise in the Majority to govern the Minority, against their will? Whence arises the Right of the Men to govern Women, without their Consent? Whence the Right of the old to bind the Young, without theirs.

But let us first Suppose, that the whole Community of every Age, Rank, Sex, and Condition, has a Right to vote. This Community, is assembled—a Motion is made and carried by a Majority of one Voice. The Minority will not agree to this. Whence arises the Right of the Majority to govern, and the Obligation of the Minority to obey? from Necessity, you will Say, because there can be no other Rule. But why exclude Women?<sup>16</sup> You will Say, because their Delicacy renders them unfit for Practice and Experience, in the great Business of Life, and the hardy Enterprizes of War, as well as the arduous Cares of State. Besides, their attention is So much engaged with the necessary Nurture of their Children, that Nature has made them fittest for domestic Cares. And Children have not Judgment or Will of their own. True. But will not these Reasons apply to others? Is it not equally true, that Men in general in every Society, who are wholly destitute of Property, are also too little acquainted with public Affairs to form a Right Judgment, and too dependent upon other Men to have a Will of their own? If this is a Fact, if you give to every Man, who has no Property, a Vote,

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<sup>15</sup> John Adams to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776, in *Papers of John Adams*, 4:208–212.

<sup>16</sup> Adams introduced the subject of women himself; Sullivan had not.

will you not make a fine encouraging Provision for Corruption by your fundamental Law? Such is the Frailty of the human Heart, that very few Men, who have no Property, have any Judgment of their own. They talk and vote as they are directed by Some Man of Property, who has attached their Minds to his Interest. . . .

Your Idea, that those Laws, which affect the Lives and personal Liberty of all, or which inflict corporal Punishment, affect those, who are not qualified to vote, as well as those who are, is just. But, So they do Women, as well as Men, Children as well as Adults. . . . for generally Speaking, Women and Children, have as good Judgment, and as independent Minds as those Men who are wholly destitute of Property: these last being to all Intents and Purposes as much dependent upon others, who will please to feed, cloath, and employ them, as Women are upon their Husbands, or Children on their Parents. . . .

Society can be governed only by general Rules. Government cannot accommodate itself to every particular Case, as it happens, nor to the Circumstances of particular Persons. . . . The only Question is, which general Rule, will accommodate most Cases and most Persons. . . .

New Claims will arise. Women will demand a Vote. Lads from 12 to 21 will think their Rights not enough attended to, and every Man, who has not a Farthing, will demand an equal Voice with any other in all Acts of State. It tends to confound and destroy all Distinctions, and prostrate all Ranks, to one common Levell.

### Document E

Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, June 30, 1780<sup>17</sup>

*This excerpt from a letter to a friend shows that Hamilton did not regard his future wife's intellect highly.*

Have you not heard that I am on the point of becoming a benedict?<sup>18</sup> I confess my sins. I am guilty. Next fall completes my doom. I give up my liberty to Miss Schuyler. She is a good hearted girl who I am sure will never play the termagant; though not a genius she has good sense enough to be agreeable.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, June 30, 1780, in *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 2:348.

<sup>18</sup> Benedict: A character in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, a longtime bachelor who finally weds.

Document F

Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, September 6, 1780<sup>19</sup>

*This excerpt from a letter to his fiancée shows that Hamilton preferred to avoid political discussions with Eliza. It is important, however, to note that Hamilton was so involved with the Revolution that (as we see in this document, as well as others) he was unable to entirely avoid political discussions.*

This event will have very serious consequences to the Southward. Peoples imaginations have already given up North Carolina and Virginia; but I do not believe either of them will fall. I am certain Virginia cannot. This misfortune affects me less than others, because it is not in my temper to repine at evils that are past, but to endeavour to draw good out of them, and because I think our safety depends on a total change of system, and this change of system will only be produced by misfortune.

Pardon me my love for talking politics to you. What have we to do with any thing but love? Go the world as it will, in each others arms we cannot but be happy.

Document G

George Washington to Annis Boudinot Stockton, August 31, 1788<sup>20</sup>

*This is an extract from letter in which Washington acknowledges the importance of women in the Revolution and questions whether women should play a role in forming the nation.*

A spirit of accommodation was happily infused into the leading characters of the Continent, and the minds of men were gradually prepared by disappointment, for the reception of a good government. Nor would I rob the fairer Sex of their share in the glory of a revolution so honorable to human nature, for, indeed, I think you Ladies are in the number of the best Patriots America can boast.

And now that I am speaking of your Sex, I will ask whether they are not capable of doing something towards introducing fœderal fashions and national manners?

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<sup>19</sup> Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, September 6, 1780, in *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 2:422.

<sup>20</sup> George Washington to Annis Boudinot Stockton, August 31, 1788, in *The Papers of George Washington. Confederation series*, eds. W.W. Abbot et al., 6 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992–97), 6:497.

## Document H

Alexander Hamilton's *Report on Manufactures*, 1791<sup>21</sup>

*Hamilton here does not discuss the role of women in terms of political theory. Instead, he discusses them in very pragmatic economic terms. He believed that in order to succeed, the nation had to become industrialized. In these excerpts from his Report on Manufactures, he outlines women's role in this. Once again, this is a gender-oriented role. At no point does he suggest that there is a sex-based reason for women to work the most menial jobs. Rather, it is assumed that this would be their role based on previous social gender assumptions.*

The Cotton Mill invented in England, within the last twenty years, is a signal illustration of the general proposition, which has been just advanced. In consequence of it, all the different processes for spinning Cotton are performed by means of Machines, which are put in motion by water, and attended chiefly by women and Children. . . .

This is—the employment of persons who would otherwise be idle (and in many cases a burthen on the community), either from the byass of temper, habit, infirmity of body, or some other cause, indisposing, or disqualifying them for the toils of the Country. It is worthy of particular remark, that, in general, women and Children are rendered more useful and the latter more early useful by manufacturing establishments, than they would otherwise be. Of the number of persons employed in the Cotton Manufactories of Great Britain, it is computed that 4/7 nearly are women and children; of whom the greatest proportion are children and many of them a very tender age. . . .

There are circumstances, which have been already noticed with another view, that materially diminish every where the effect of a scarcity of hands. These circumstances are—the great use which can be made of women and children.

## Document I

Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton's note on Washington's Farewell Address, August 7, 1840.<sup>22</sup>

*In this document Eliza shows us that, despite her absence from other documents, she was involved in her husband's political career.*

Desirous that my children should be fully acquainted with the services rendered by their Father to our Country, and the assistance given by him to General Washington during his administration, for the one great object, the Independence and Stability of the Government of the

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "Report on Manufactures," in *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 10: 252–53, 270.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, Note on Washington's Farewell Address, August 7, 1840, in *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 20:172–73.

United States, there is one thing in addition to the numerous proofs which I leave them and which I feel myself in duty bound to State; Which is: that a short time previous to General Washington's retiring from the Presidency in the year 1796 General Hamilton suggested to him the idea of delivering a farewell address to the people on his withdrawal from public life, with which idea General Washington was well pleased, and in his answer to General Hamilton's suggestion, gave him the heads of the subjects on which he would wish to remark, with a request that Mr Hamilton would prepare an address for him; Mr. Hamilton did so, and the address was written, principally at such times as his office was seldom frequented by his clients and visitors, and during the absence of his students to avoid interruption; at which times he was in the habit of calling me to sit with him, that he might read to me as he wrote, in order, as he said, to discover how it sounded upon the ear, and making the remark, "My dear Eliza you must be to me, what Moliere's old nurse was to him."

The whole or nearly all the "Address," was read to me by him as he wrote it and a greater part if not all was written by him in my presence. . . .

