

Deputy Husbands and Republican Mothers: Traditional Women's Roles Become Wedge for
Change

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Traditionally, when recounting historical events, historians tend to leave out certain marginal groups such as women, slaves, or immigrants. This is no different with depictions of the American Revolutionary era. When first addressing the individuals impacted by the American Revolution, the causes that led up to the fighting, and finally the new nation that emerged after, women are left out because they were thought to not have played a political role in a very politically-oriented time in history. This thesis aims to insert women back into the revolutionary narrative, most specifically the period before the American Revolution (1775-1783) began, to show that even women were prescribed to very narrow roles, they could still in fact contribute to society using their influence in the domestic sphere.

Before 1980, American Revolutionary history had focused on only men and their role in bringing about revolution. In what way can it be said about upper-class women who impacted these men and, within their own spheres, found ways to gain power on their own behalf? Three major historians emerged between 1980 and 1982 to change this perspective about elite women's roles. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Linda Kerber, and Mary Beth Norton all had a similar outlook on colonial women's roles: during the revolutionary era, women in fact played an important political role. It was just very different from the conventional role that many men had in politics during the same time. Each of these historians argue that women achieved much, but they each analyzed different aspects of women's lives ranging from their abilities to take over the household while their husbands were away to how they used their traditional roles as justification for political action. They even came to different conclusions about how those achievements were perceived by the elite women themselves. All of these conclusions have been helpful in recasting the history before the American Revolution. Without these historians' viewpoints, women may not have been included in standard historiography until much later.

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich first focused her work, *Good Wives: Image and Reality on the Lives of Women on Northern New England 1650-1750*, on defining the various possible roles that women could have during the time; these included housewife, mother, neighbor, and even a role she coined “deputy husband.”¹ Deputy husbands were women who took on some larger responsibilities of the household while their husbands were away for extended periods of time. This position occurred very frequently, especially during wartime, and allowed women to become familiar with some of the responsibilities of men in a socially respectable way. According to Ulrich, deputy husbandship became an acceptable way for women to exercise roles outside of their prescribed spheres of domesticity and housewifery. Eventually though, some roles became blended as “a wife was expected to become expert in the management of a household and the care of children, but she was also asked to assist in the economic affairs of her husband, becoming his representative and even his surrogate if circumstances demanded it.”² Because of this double standard, wives could only do as much as society told them they could do, however they were expected to accomplish much more. Deputy husbandship became as important for some as it became burdensome to others. Ulrich stresses that each woman’s roles in the household became unique as they were based on the idea that “as long as it furthered the good of her family and was acceptable to her husband,” the wife could inherit a new responsibility.³ It depended on how flexible the husband was. In the end, deputy husbandship was a way in which women could explore other various roles without fear of social repercussions. This was the ideology that women needed in order to use their changing domestic roles as a wedge for change.

¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982).

² Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 49- 50.

³ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 38.

Focusing more on the effects of the American Revolution on women, Linda Kerber goes against most other historians of the time saying women did in fact gain some power after the Revolution. They gained “Republican Motherhood,” as she calls it, and used it as a justification for their new political actions within the domestic sphere. Essentially transforming “political ‘virtue’” into a domestic ideology, Republican Motherhood called for women to inject virtue into the household (and indirectly, through their husbands, into the Republic) after the revolution.⁴ This led to the household transforming into a pure sphere where men and husbands went to escape the vices and wrongdoings of the rest of the world. It was also a place for mothers to properly educate their children; women were impacting the stereotypical perceptions of society by transforming their role as educators into a political role. Women’s claim to greater education came because they needed to educate themselves if they were going to educate their children under the ideology of Republican Motherhood. In this way, women made a claim to a larger role while justifying to themselves why they needed more education. This internal resistance was the first step to emerging into their wider roles. Even though education was still considered part of the domestic sphere, Kerber argues that this demonstrated clearer political participation because women became responsible for educating the next generation, the people who would grow up to foster a great nation after the war was over. Hints of Kerber’s Republican Motherhood can be traced back to pre-Revolutionary times, since some women aimed to create a proper, conventional household even when taking on deputy husband responsibilities.

Mary Beth Norton, author of *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, examines how the American Revolution impacted women and shifted their social role mostly within the household. “The 1780s and 1790s witnessed changes

⁴ Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 11.

in women's private lives – in familial organization, personal aspirations, and self-assessments.”⁵ She alludes to the concepts of deputy husbandship and Republican Motherhood that her fellow historians explore in depth, but Norton continues on a more Revolutionary War-centered path. According to Norton, women were just as exposed to the changes taking shape in the colonies right before the revolution began as men were. “White women, . . . , were by the 1780s reading widely in political literature, publishing their own sentiments, engaging in heated debates, and avidly supporting the war effort” as they witnessed political dissent, boycotts, and in some cases even soldiers in their towns.⁶ She argues that women began to read political literature and even helped support the Revolutionary causes with household skills like making homespun fabric. Homespun, or the ability to make cloth and clothing in the home, was a central skill that women used to aid in their political participation of the war. Participants made a statement by not purchasing manufactured goods imported from Britain. Ultimately, Norton concludes that “the reevaluation of domesticity that began during the revolutionary years would eventually culminate in nineteenth-century culture's glorification of women's household role.”⁷ Once the revolution ended, women fought for larger political and economic voices, but their social roles were the only aspect of their lives that was reassessed. Regardless of how much influence they had in other spheres, in the end, a woman was still a woman, a wife, a mother, and a domestic individual.

Liberty's Daughters is dedicated to shedding light on the instances in which women had power in their domestic spheres. While this idea might be partially true, there is much to say about women who extended their influence beyond their household roles. Norton fails to

⁵ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), xv.

⁶ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 156.

⁷ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 155.

acknowledge an important reason why women may have only seen themselves in their domestic spheres: they may not have been conscious of their potential roles. While some women seized their deputy husband responsibilities, others were hesitant to explore non-traditional female responsibilities. These tasks, many later came to learn, allowed the elite women to explore other aspects of society from agriculture to trade; these women just did not *realize* it at the time.

All three women historians agree on one main idea – the social roles of women and men cannot be specifically defined in black and white. Because of deputy husbandship, the emergence of Republican Motherhood, and the social disruption that came with the American Revolution, it is nearly impossible to say that all women had these acceptable roles while all men had another set of acceptable roles. Ulrich writes that “the role of housewife and the role of deputy husband were two sides of the same coin” in that regardless of the task a good wife was doing, she always had the best interest of the family at heart and was continuously loyal to her husband.⁸ Each case is unique, which allows for an interesting study of select women and their different influences on society.

Continuing on in the 1980s, the work of these historians was used by other scholars studying specific women during the American Revolutionary period. By incorporating these originally progressive works into their own writings about elite women such as Penelope Barker, Abigail Adams, and Eliza Lucas Pinkney, the authors gained great perspective of the role of women during this time and added their own arguments in regards to these specific women’s lives. Presently, researchers can now pinpoint exactly how some women not only stayed in their traditional role, but also expanded their power in society in a variety of ways. For example, Edith B. Gelles, a notable historian of Abigail Adams, very realistically suggests that Adams was

⁸ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 47.

a deputy husband who was learning what her new roles were while trying to keep the Adams farm afloat and free from debt. Gelles paints a realistic picture of Adams' struggle to balance being a good wife, mother, and caretaker of the farm. This directly builds off of Ulrich's idea of deputy husbandship that women could still operate within their sphere while having larger, more economic roles in the household.

Women's inclusion into the history of the American Revolution is completely propelled forward by 1980, thanks to works by Ulrich, Kerber, and Norton. Readers are introduced to the idea that women did in fact hold very unique roles during the politically charged Revolutionary era that allowed them to use what had been their traditional domestic skills as a wedge for change and increased power. Terms such as deputy husband and Republican Motherhood allow women's roles to be put into perspective and examined under a more scrupulous lens. Historians can now see how men's and women's roles were by no means separately defined, but at times instead, overlapped. These new views allow for a much clearer connection between women's domestic roles and their attempts to gain power before and after the American Revolution.

Traditional Role of Women

Before the American Revolution, and even after, most women adhered to their traditional circumscribed roles. A wife and mother, according to Norton, "would maintain no identity separate from that of her male-defined family and her household responsibilities. ... Her position within the home was secondary to that of her husband. She was expected to follow his orders, and he assumed control over the family finances."⁹ Since they were not usually allowed to take part in any sort of political or social activities outside of their sphere before this revolutionary

⁹ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 156.

time, women worked in the home as domestic beings; they took care of the children, cooked, kept a neat household, and provided a safe and cohesive home environment.

As Norton points out, women's roles largely depended upon the household: its financial status in society, whether or not there were servants or slaves present to help, and its geographic location.¹⁰ In the South for example, Norton uses the word "circumscribed" to describe how women's roles were determined as aspects such as race largely dictated what responsibilities women held and which skills they had.¹¹ For Southern elite women, there was a need for management and direction skills rather than learning how to complete menial household tasks. Instead, they needed to keep control of their slaves and keep the household running smoothly. Only slave women would be expected to know skills such as cooking and cleaning.¹²

This traditional framework originated not in the colonies, but from countries, like England, where the colonists came from. The traditional ideology is even evident in writings from the country. Reverend James Fordyce spoke to young women through his *Sermons to Young Women* addressing many issues from how to behave in a lady-like manner, how to dress simply, and how to be virtuous and reserved when speaking and acting.¹³ These various subjects, without even reading the actual sermons, speak to the English perspective that women are to be dainty, submissive, and coy. They are being told by others what clothes to wear and are being taught to suppress their thoughts and only entertain those that would not unrightfully attract a male counterpart or any other sort of attention. According to Fordyce, women should

¹⁰ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 8-9.

¹¹ Mary Beth Norton, "What an Alarming Crisis Is This': Southern Women and the American Revolution," *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution*, ed. Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1978), 211.

¹² Norton, "What an Alarming Crisis Is This': Southern Women and the American Revolution," 207.

¹³ James Fordyce, vol. 1 of *Sermons to Young Women: In Two Volumes*, (England: NP, 1767).

only dress simply so as not to catch a man's wandering eye. He believes, "that if a young lady is deeply possessed with a regard for 'whatsoever things are pure, venerable, and of a good report' it will lead to decorum spontaneously, and flow with unstudied prosperity through every part of her attire and demeanour" so women who are correct and traditional will know how to dress and behave well.¹⁴ Fordyce continues by saying that reserve is also extremely important because without it, more curiosity is indulged and then "the emotions of delicacy are less frequent, less strong."¹⁵ "At the image of sin [young women] tremble no longer ... [and] all the internal fences of modesty are broken down" when women do not adhere to their prescribed roles and practice contributing their own opinions instead of reserving themselves.¹⁶

Comparing Fordyce's opinions to that of colonists in the New World about three decades later, historians find that, for many, things had not greatly changed. Historian Betty Wood points out that,

Crossing the Atlantic did not produce a dramatic or permanent change in the status of women, or it might be added, in the attitude of most women towards their designated role in society. ... The colonists had no intention of jettisoning the social thought, roles, and relationships which underpinned English society. What they sought to create in the New World were their own versions, sometimes highly idealized or anachronistic versions, of that society.¹⁷

Here, Wood directly states that colonists were not looking to reinvent the wheel when they moved to the colonies, but rather, only wanted to create a better society in their eyes. Because of this idea and these writings such as Fordyce's essays, women, especially elite women, were very

¹⁴ Fordyce, vol. 1 of *Sermons to Young Women: In Two Volumes*, 39.

¹⁵ Fordyce, vol. 1 of *Sermons to Young Women: In Two Volumes*, 64.

¹⁶ Fordyce, vol. 1 of *Sermons to Young Women: In Two Volumes*, 65.

¹⁷ Betty Wood, "The impact of the Revolution on the role, status, and experience of women," *A Companion to The American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 421.

focused on staying within their sanctioned sphere and making sure that they stayed feminine and proper. They would not even dare *attempt* to think about tasks or duties that would bring them outside of the socially acceptable realm. If women were to exercise something like political activism that was deemed improper, they could be cast as unladylike. It was not until the Revolution loomed in the near future that women were given opportunities to step outside of their more rigid traditional roles while still being viewed as a “proper” woman. Even the thought of social exclusion as the price paid for their attempts to influence society in ways outside of the home, was completely frightening for many elite women; it prevented many from even trying to do more with their eventually expanded roles.

Many men even went so far as to criticize women for having bad posture or too much education. One of John Adams’ letters to Abigail Smith during their courtship points out all of her aspects he views as faults, which include everything from posture to walking correctly. This letter demonstrates how scrutinizing some men at this time were of women. It also shows how women, in some cases, were viewed for their physical beauty. One fault that Adams points out is, “You do not sit, erected as you ought, by which Means, it happens that you appear too short for a Beauty.”¹⁸ Adams is focusing on the beauty of a woman, but what about the beauty of her mind or her excellent house skills? He then continues on to say, “This Fault is the Effect and Consequence of another, still more inexcusable in a Lady. I mean an Habit of Reading, Writing and Thinking. -- But both the Cause and the Effect ought to be repented and amended as soon as possible.”¹⁹ Here, Adams goes so far as to say that women should not think or be educated.

¹⁸ Letter from John Adams to Abigail Smith, 7 May 1764 [electronic edition], *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

¹⁹ Letter from John Adams to Abigail Smith, 7 May 1764, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.

Evidently, a man finds it completely acceptable to criticize a woman that he is courting – this woman is not yet even his wife.

It is important to note that this particular letter as well as other letters written by Adams must be read within context. John Adams actually looked favorably on his wife for her education and political views. Later on during the American Revolution and the foundation of a new nation, he often looked to her for advice and she became a sound board for political ideas. As reviewer Ralph Brown points out, “Inevitably, because of John’s confidence in her loyalty, judgement, and discretion, Abigail’s life became entwined with the decisions, the actions, frustrations, and achievements of her husband.”²⁰ The couple’s letters actually “reveal a compatibility of intelligence, wit, and interests that would endure” for many years.²¹ In this particular letter, John Adams is teasing his future wife when he criticizes her posture and the negative effects of her education. Even though it is teasing, it is a great example of the typical male perspective of the time. The letter shows present day readers how a woman’s beauty and poise were extremely important to men during this colonial age. Readers receive a glimpse not into the mind of Adams per say, but the minds that Adams was subtly criticizing and the view of women that he did not agree with. This example serves as a model for what some marriages, good marriages, were in the eighteenth century. Educated women were being ridiculed as if they were children. Even Abigail, an educated, proper woman for the time, is being threatened as she is considered unfavorable marriage material by John in this particular letter. The idea of a “good” marriage does not extend very far for women.

²⁰ Ralph A. Brown, 1980, “Review of Abigail Adams, an American Woman,” *The New England Quarterly* 53 (3), The New England Quarterly, Inc.: 397, doi:10.2307/365132.

²¹ Edith B. Gelles, “The Abigail Industry,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1988), Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture: 659, doi:10.2307/2936982.

When looking at upper-class colonial women in both the North and the South, it is evident that each woman's situation is unique, but there are many commonalities throughout besides the traditional work each woman was expected to complete. For one, "men believed that women should enjoy their domestic role. . . . Women too anticipated happiness from achieving the goal of notable housewifery," but they were both mistaken. Many women did not see housewifery as a "source of pride and satisfaction" or "find fulfillment" or even to "take pleasure" in their duties.²² In fact, many instead commented on the monotony and routine of these many household responsibilities, leading women to become bored with their situations. "Against the backdrop of their husbands' diverse experiences, the invariable daily and weekly routines of housewifery seemed dull and uninteresting to eighteenth-century women."²³ This boredom gave way to women's desires to do more with themselves; they wanted to become educated, literate, and aware of what was happening in society. The traditional framework in this perspective is very oppressive on women and their potential abilities all because they are not supposed to leave their prescribed sphere. Norton sums up women's suffocating traditional framework well when she states that, "Notable housewifery was conceived to be an end in itself, rather than as a means to a greater or more meaningful goal."²⁴ Household work, as it was told to women, was their single duty in society. However, as other ideologies emerged about women's role in society, housewifery was only the beginning of a greater goal to influence others and gain more power.

²² Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 34.

²³ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 35.

²⁴ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 38.

Non-Traditional Social Framework for Women

There were, of course, many men and women just like John and Abigail Adams who did not believe in this close-minded view of women. Instead, these individuals pushed for a more open-minded view of women's roles in society. Joseph Addison is one very early example of a man who embodied this thinking. Living from 1672 to 1719, Addison wrote about British women and their abilities to participate in politics as well as domestic life. In his essays, he states, "It is with great pleasure that I see a race of female patriots springing up in this island. The fairest among the daughters of Great Britain no longer confine their cares to a domestic life, but are grown anxious for the welfare of their country, and show themselves good stateswomen as well as good housewives."²⁵ When these essays were reprinted almost a century later, women recognized their role as women in the colonies. With many of Addison's own essays and articles being printed in his magazine, *The Spectator*, and his newspaper, *The Guardian*, Addison was able to reach a large audience. The magazine and newspaper were so popular that, "they were at all the breakfast tables, and in all the coffee-houses, and the talk of all the town. To confess to not having read them then, was a confession of a man's own want of taste."²⁶ With this widespread publicity, Addison's messages reached many people. His voice about this non-traditional framework was momentous for the time.

When John Peter Zenger republished an article by Addison in his paper *The New-York Weekly Journal*, for example, he was bringing this influential essayist's different perspectives to the colonies and forcing people to consider his ideologies. In the original article, "Arguments for Educating Women," Addison says women have excellent speaking voices and more idle time to

²⁵ "Politics and the Fan," *Essays of Joseph Addison*, ed. John Richard Green, (London: Macmillan and Co., 1885), 93.

²⁶ "Joseph Addison," *The Illustrated Magazine of Art* 1 (5), (Thomas J. Watson Library, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1853), 305–6. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20537988>.

put towards knowledge. There is also a concern that children will grow up as “dunce[s]” if the father is not present often and the mother is the one educating the family.²⁷ He asks questions to readers such as, “Since [females] have the same improvable Minds as the male Part of the Species, why should they not be cultivated by the same Method? Why should Reason be left to it self in one of the Sexes, and be disciplined with so much Care in the other.”²⁸ He even goes so far as to put both men and women on the same footing saying, “Learning and Knowledge are Perfections in us, not as we are Men, but as we are reasonable Creatures, in which Order, of Beings the Female World is upon the same Level with the Male.”²⁹ Zenger reiterated these same sentiments when the article appeared on the front page of his own paper.

This article was a very large and thought-provoking statement for its time since women were not supposed to be too educated as their controversial domestic roles did not call for higher thinking. This was reserved for upper-class men who needed the schooling for politics or other jobs outside of the home. Wood describes education opportunities for elite women at the time as “designed to fit them for their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers” and that “higher education was effectively closed to them.”³⁰ Many “men deemed [education] both unnecessary and beyond their intellectual capacity.”³¹ Clearly, this traditional view needed to be combatted and men like Joseph Addison saw the benefits that educated women could have on society.

²⁷ Joseph Addison, “Arguments for Educating Women,” republished in *New-York Weekly Journal*, Vol. 933, no. 80, May 19, 1735, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/collections/51566077-9fea-4c79-a09e-604635695170>.

²⁸ Joseph Addison, “Arguments for Educating Women,” republished in *New-York Weekly Journal*, May 19, 1735.

²⁹ Joseph Addison, “Arguments for Educating Women,” republished in *New-York Weekly Journal*, May 19, 1735.

³⁰ Betty Wood, “The impact of the Revolution on the role, status, and experience of women,” 421.

³¹ Betty Wood, “The impact of the Revolution on the role, status, and experience of women,” 421.

Deputy Husbandship – Women’s Sphere Expanded

With various taxes, boycotts, riots, and subversive meetings taking place on the eve of the American Revolution, another ideology came to the forefront of society, somewhat marrying both the traditional and non-traditional social spheres prescribed to women. The term “deputy husband,” as it was coined by Ulrich in 1980, refers to women and the expansion of their socially acceptable roles and responsibilities while their husbands were away. With the American Revolution approaching, men were going off to fight in the war or, like in the case of Abigail and John Adams, joining delegation meetings for long periods of time. Now, by incorporating the role of a deputy husband more and more frequently into their lives, elite women had the justification that they needed to take on more roles and become more aware about what was occurring in society, especially now with the changing social climate. Ulrich states that by using deputy husbandship as justification, many tasks became “suitable for a woman as long as it furthered the good of her family and was acceptable to her husband. . . . It allowed for varied behavior without really challenging the patriarchal order of society.”³² This situation now solved the issue that women were having about their monotonous routine in the household and even allowed them to expand their influence. According to Ulrich, women, under this new term, not only gained new privilege of more influence over the household, but it was seen as their “responsibility to do so.”³³

Upper-class women were no longer supposed to just stay in the domestic role as the traditional framework suggests, but they were also beginning to participate in economic matters that men originally solely dealt with. Whether it was someone like John Adams who was away at the Continental Congress or a soldier off fighting in the Revolution, when men were away

³² Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 38.

³³ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 38.

from their families, their wives were the ones who took care of the farm and household in their absence. This meant that these women made important decisions concerning economics and even politics. “As long as business transactions remained personal and a woman had the support of a familiar environment, she could move rather easily from the role of housewife to the role of deputy husband, though few women were prepared either by education or experience” to fully become independent with these responsibilities.³⁴ This mention of education by Ulrich is extremely significant because at this time, when deputy husbandship was changing the way women viewed their responsibilities, it pushed women to look for more opportunities to educate themselves. Because they were learning so many new things about economics and the duties that their husbands usually kept to themselves in the past, women slowly began to use their new, yet still traditional roles as a wedge for change and enhanced power while keeping to their conventional sphere.

The ideology of “Republican Motherhood,” as named by Kerber in 1980, officially emerged after the American Revolution, but its beginnings took root before the war as it “integrated political values into [women’s] domestic [lives].”³⁵ Women could now begin impacting society with the help of Republican Motherhood. Women used their traditional framework and their moral ideas, which Fordyce mentions in his writings, in a more impactful way in the household as “the mother, and not the masses, came to be seen as the custodian of civic morality.”³⁶ By keeping good morals inside of the home, women created a model environment for their families. They were even recognized as the principal educators of their children, specifically their daughters. Mothers taught them household skills that they could carry

³⁴ Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 50.

³⁵ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 11.

³⁶ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 11.

with them throughout life once they were married and had families of their own. Betty Wood comments that, “A woman’s importance lay in what she contributed as a wife and mother to the formation and continuing cohesion of the family unit. Her broader civic duty lay in the influence she might bring to bear on shaping, and perhaps moderating, the opinions and attitudes of her husband and sons.”³⁷ In this excerpt, Wood makes it very clear that women are seen as the glue that held the household together, the slight beginnings of Republican Motherhood. The concept even extends farther than this according to Constance Schultz, another interpreter of Kerber’s work. She says, “These mothers understood and articulated that their teaching was critical in preserving the republic from corruption and failure.”³⁸ Now, women’s roles have extended beyond the household to the colonies as a whole.

Women Take Advantage of Revolution in the Air

The ideological clash between the traditional and non-traditional role of women is greatly affected by the beginnings of the American Revolution and the period right before the fighting began. Mary Beth Norton explains that at this time, there was much unrest, public demonstration, and dispute occurring in many towns. These actions were seen by all, including women. Even if women were in the household and domestic sphere, they were not ignorant of the changes occurring daily. Norton writes, “Public demonstrations against British policy . . . , celebrations of the repeal of hated parliamentary acts . . . , and incidents of mob action necessarily impinged upon the consciousness of women who had previously left public affairs entirely to

³⁷ Betty Wood, “The impact of the Revolution on the role, status, and experience of women,” 421.

³⁸ Constance B. Schultz, “Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry: A South Carolina Revolutionary-Era Mother and Daughter,” *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, ed. Marjorie Julian Spruill, et al, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009) 94. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.

their husbands, fathers, and brothers.”³⁹ Now, women were beginning to see the changes in society – changes that they could potentially be a part of.

Women’s household skills and economic support became very valuable once the Continental Association was passed in the colonies in 1775. The Association was an agreement concerning limits on imports and exports that the Continental Congress put into effect in the hopes of damaging the English economy. According to historian Robert Middlekauff, “The Association expressed values which tied Americans together and suggested that in their desire to protect their right to self-government there was a moral concern transcending the constitutional questions in conflict.”⁴⁰ It urged the colonists to reflect on their desire for self-government free from British interference and oppressive Parliamentary taxes. This legislation suggested that the colonists refer back to a simpler time in the eighteenth century when they were not as reliant on Britain for goods and practice “frugality, economy, and industry” to negatively impact the British economy.⁴¹ According to extracts from the votes and proceedings of the Continental Congress, many delegates agreed “that a non-importation, non-consumption, and non-exportation agreement, faithfully adhered to, will prove the most speedy, effectual, and peaceable measure” to stand their ground and demonstrate to Britain that it could not just place unjust tax laws on the colonies.⁴²

³⁹ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 155.

⁴⁰ Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763-1789*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 255.

⁴¹ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution 1763-1789*, 255.

⁴² *Extracts from Votes and Proceedings of the American Continental Congress, Held at Philadelphia on the 5th of September 1774: Containing the Bill of Rights, a List of Grievances, Occasional Resolves, the Association, an Address to the People of Great Britain, and a Memorial to the Inhabitants of the British American Colonies*, (Philadelphia: Edes and Gill, in Queen street, and T. and J. Fleet in Cornhill, 1774), 14.

Of course, this was met with mixed emotions in each colony as many farmers and merchants wanted to trade and make money and others, like Loyalists, wanted to purchase British goods. In order to ensure that the Association was followed by all people in the colonies, the Congress insisted that committees in each town or county be elected to enforce the boycotts and trade restrictions outlined in the agreement. In the meeting, it was said “That a committee be chosen in every country, city, and town, by those who are qualified to vote for Representatives in the Legislature, whose business it shall be attentively to observe the conduct of all persons touching this association.”⁴³ Congress also commented that if, “any person within the limits of their appointment has violated this association, that such majority do forthwith cause the truth of the case to be published in the Gazette, to the end that all such foes to the rights of the British American may be publicly known, and universally contemned as the enemies of American liberty.”⁴⁴ There were harsh consequences if colonists did not adhere to the new agreement such as printing the names of the wrongdoers in the local newspaper so other colonists would not support them. With the new Association put into effect, real political power was handed directly to small local groups. This delegation of power to help the colonies as a whole spread to all social groups, even women. They could use their household skills to make items instead of purchasing manufactured goods imported from Great Britain or could make certain that their households did not drink English tea. Women ensured that the colonists would adhere to the Association and at the same time, demonstrated their usefulness outside of the home.

Many women began to read political literature, if they were literate, and support the war effort in various ways, most notably with their household skills.⁴⁵ Because women were able to

⁴³ *Extracts from Votes and Proceedings of the American Continental Congress*, 16.

⁴⁴ *Extracts from Votes and Proceedings of the American Continental Congress*, 17.

⁴⁵ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 159.

help the Patriot cause with their household skills, they began using their prescribed roles to slowly push their boundaries into more social and, even in some cases, political spheres.

Homespun, homemade woven cloth, is a prime example of how women could use a traditional skill to politically impact the colonies by encouraging boycotts of British goods. Women used their regular craft of sewing for their families on a large scale as they created cloth and clothing for colonists. Homespun is then not a household skill itself, but a new movement that emerged from the simpler task of sewing into a much more impactful job. This contributed to the tensions between the colonies and Great Britain before the American Revolution. “Male patriots ... quickly realized their dependence on women’s efforts”, especially in making clothes.⁴⁶ Norton adds that once leaders chose to include economic boycotts as a way to protest Great Britain, the domestic roles of women became politically significant.⁴⁷ Now, even regular everyday actions, such as making tea, sewing clothing, and buying goods, became politically charged. Women became part of the political war narrative, and by using their domestic roles no less. Without the women, there would still have been a large dependence on manufactured British goods.

In the North, women came together at “spinning bees” to make homespun and weave clothes. These social gatherings allowed them to converse with one another and continue the female social culture at the time; however, it was now laced with social action as women were at the forefront of one aspect of the Revolution. Norton explains that these bees became somewhat of a ritualized gathering. The meetings began early in the morning with spinning, ended in the evening with a sermon by a local clergyman, and included a lunchtime in which the women “[engaged] in enlightening conversation,” no doubt about the revolution and how they were

⁴⁶ DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women’s Eyes An American History With Documents Volume One: To 1900*, 126.

⁴⁷ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 155.

assisting the cause.⁴⁸ Many spectators even came to watch the spinning bees, encouraging the women even more. The bees were extremely successful and elevated a woman's position, even if just among her peers, and not necessarily in the eyes of men.

Many male leaders did not agree with the newly established position of women. They understood that they needed women's cooperation for the boycott movement to take hold, but they were unwilling to give more power to their supposedly docile, domestic counterparts. The leaders "wanted to set the limits of women's activism" as "they did not expect, or approve, signs of feminine autonomy."⁴⁹ Women, according to these men, should not be thinking or moving freely outside of the home; "Many men felt that women should remain at the hearth, taking care of family and home, and leave other affairs to men."⁵⁰ The men were beginning to feel that women's power was becoming dangerous and too greatly impacting society. The traditional framework of women, followed rigidly by many men, fostered an unease that led to much criticism of these women. Women could not possibly "be equal to men politically, socially, or religiously."⁵¹ They were, instead, there to serve – serve their husbands, children, and society – in a moral, domestic capacity, not a political one. *Parker's New York Gazette* published an anonymous "Letter to a Lady" in 1760 which discusses the traditional view of the changing gender roles of the time. The writer stated:

She who makes her husband and her children happy, who reclaims the one from vice, or trains up the others to virtue, is a much greater character than the finest lady that ever existed in poetry, or romance, whose whole occupation it has been to murder mankind

⁴⁸ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 155.

⁴⁹ Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 155.

⁵⁰ David A. Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers: Primary Documents on Events of the Period*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 318.

⁵¹ Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers*, 318.

with the shafts from her quiver, or her eyes. Women ... are not naturally formed for great cares themselves, but to soften our's.⁵²

Women exist only in a domestic capacity, as beings who function as reminders of goodness and virtue in society, not people who impress their ideas upon others. According to this author, they were not made to speak up about themselves, but instead, they were there to help men face their great burdens through their household and motherly duties.

DuBois has a very interesting conclusion to this ideological divide. She says, “Despite the widespread sense that politics was not a woman’s affair, participation in the boycotts and in the production of homespun did bring women to the margins of political action and encouraged them to see themselves as part of a larger American whole,” which was demonstrated with the implementation of the Association in the colonies.⁵³ However, DuBois goes on to contradict her earlier statement saying, “despite the centrality of women’s contributions to the success of the Americans’ resistance, their efforts were extensions of their roles within the home – as goodwives and consumers – and, as such, the potential challenge to the gender order was minimized.”⁵⁴ This is incorrect because, while the women may not have completely changed all of the roles associated with their gender, they made extremely significant strides in using their domestic roles as a wedge for social and political change. They used the resources they had and social changes that they faced to adapt to their specific circumstances of the time.

Penelope Barker: Head of the First Women’s Political Tea Party

One woman in particular who used these changes and expanded roles in domestic life in a larger way is Penelope Barker, an upper-class woman living in Edenton, North Carolina.

⁵² Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers*, 322.

⁵³ DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women’s Eyes An American History With Documents Volume One: To 1900*, 128-129.

⁵⁴ DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women’s Eyes An American History With Documents Volume One: To 1900*, 129.

Throughout her life, Barker was given many responsibilities. After her father and sister died, she had to take care of her sister's children and marry her late sister's husband, John Hodgson; she assumed an entire household overnight. Then, within a year of the new marriage, Hodgson passed away as well and Barker was left with an entire plantation to run. She became a deputy husband and had economic responsibilities quickly thrust upon her – all of this only occurring at the young age of nineteen. Barker married again, this time to a wealthy local planter named James Craven who also died within a few short years. Most of the estate passed to Barker, making her a very eligible bachelorette. She then married one last time to Thomas Barker. When he was sent to England to speak on behalf of the colony of North Carolina right before and during the American Revolution, Penelope Barker was left to take care of the plantation and shouldered all of the responsibilities that came with it. Once again, Barker became a deputy husband.

Historian Michael Martin Jr. argues that the loss in Barker's life from the death of family members and several children led her to be a more driven, determined, practical problem solver, unlike many other colonial women of the time.⁵⁵ She was used to taking on tasks that were not necessarily designated for women, but, as a deputy husband, she officially expanded her roles. Up until the Edenton Tea Party, Barker had used her role as mother, wife, household organizer, and of course deputy husband to justify her expanded responsibilities which ranged from taking care of her sister's children to assuming the role of head of the household when two of her husbands died. This extension of her control, coupled with her upper-class status in society, was very encouraging to other women in Edenton. Seeing Penelope Barker and her increased power, both inside and outside of the household, persuaded women to join her in the Edenton Tea Party

⁵⁵ Michael G. Martin Jr., "Penelope Barker," NCPedia, last modified October 21, 2015, <http://ncpedia.org/biography/barker-penelope>.

on October 25, 1775 they continued to join her as they went on to impact the revolutionary movement in their own ways. It became clear that Barker was one of the frontrunners who called for women's political action and participation.

Organizing a large boycott, known as the Edenton Tea Party, Barker rallied fifty-one women in the area to call for a boycott on all English goods from tea to clothing. They all signed a document reading, "We the Ladyes of Edenton, do hereby solemnly engage not to conform to ye pernicious Custom of Drinking Tea, or that we, the aforesaid Ladyes, will not promote ye wear of any manufacture from England, until such time that all Acts which tend to enslave this our Native Country shall be repealed."⁵⁶ This tea party is referred to by historians as the "first women's political meeting in British North America" and the first time "female Americans formally shouldered the responsibility of a public role ... [and] claimed a voice ... in public policy."⁵⁷ At the meeting, Barker said, "Maybe it has only been men who have protested the king up to now. That only means we women have taken too long to let our voices be heard", and with that she signed a declaration with the other women promising to boycott British goods.⁵⁸ Barker understood that she could exploit her status as an upper-class woman along with the social unrest that preceded the Revolution to push for political change. As an elite woman, Barker used her well respected social standing to her benefit, since she could force her boundaries a little farther without raising too much concern. This declaration, in turn, allowed

⁵⁶ Michael G. Martin Jr., "Penelope Barker," <http://ncpedia.org/biography/barker-penelope>. Original source: Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, 6 volumes, ed. William S. Powell, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979-1996).

⁵⁷ Walter Russell Mead, 2011, "The Tea Party and American Foreign Policy: What Populism Means for Globalism," *Foreign Affairs*, 90 (2), Council on Foreign Relations: 28–44, 28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25800455>.; Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 161.

⁵⁸ Penelope Barker (1728-1796), National Women's History Museum, last modified regularly, <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/penelope-barker/>.

other women (the fifty-one signers) to see that they could make a difference outside of their households.

Copeland examines traditional viewpoints of women as found in newspapers of the time and compiles the feelings into the general consensus that the women who participated in the Edenton Tea Party were viewed as “vicious for ignoring their nurturing role, frittering away time in idle activities, subverting society through crime, and breaking the mold of traditional patterns of behavior for women.”⁵⁹ Men frowned upon women’s political engagement and again promoted the idea that women should spend their time at home tending to their children instead of attending frivolous meetings like these. This translated to neglect in men’s eyes. Some people took the tea party as a joke. A British cartoonist even drew an image of the meeting in which a dog is urinating on one of the women signers and there is a child sitting under the table either playing or making a mess. Both of these points speak to men’s disdain for politically active women who were neglecting their role as mothers. Also, the woman holding a gavel appears with very mannish features, indicating yet again the impression that women had no place in politics, but that it should be reserved only as part of the man’s sphere.⁶⁰

On the contrary though, the Edenton Tea Party was noteworthy for the women in Edenton because it demonstrated that they could have a voice despite their supposed place in society. They defied the social laws not only by meeting together, but by choosing to not purchase British goods. Mary Beth Norton does not give this point enough credit in her writing as she states that women simply made choices about which goods to buy and which goods not to

⁵⁹ Copeland, *Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers* , 318-319.

⁶⁰ Philip Dawe, *A society of patriotic ladies, at Edenton in North Carolina*, print mezzotint, 1775, printed for R. Sayer & J. Bennett, London, England, <https://www.loc.gov/item/96511606/>.

buy. According to her, they never left their designated domestic sphere.⁶¹ Just because the women did not leave their domestic sphere does not mean they did not have influence. Because of this choice to not purchase any British goods, other movements, such as the spinning bees, began. What is crucial is that the women became *conscious* of their potential role. Norton goes on to say that, “once the context [of their domestic role] had changed, so too did women’s understanding of the meaning of their traditional tasks.”⁶² Women became more aware that even their customary roles could be used to help create change. This was a huge step forward for women and also created more drive and opportunity among the upper-class women to help the war effort to combat Great Britain.

Abigail Adams: The Unconsciously Progressive Woman

Few women came as close to the American Revolution, both physically and politically, as Abigail Adams. As the wife of legendary lawyer and influential political delegate, John Adams, she was more exposed to the even lesser known nuances of the revolution than other women of similar means and social standing. John confided in Abigail both at home and while away working with the Continental Congress and eventually to form the government of a new nation. During this time, John “gave vent to his frustrations over the petty quarrels among delegates and the slow pace of their discussions, feelings he could entrust with no one else.”⁶³ He trusted Abigail above everyone else and appreciated her listening ear as well as her advice. They often discussed politics, Abigail giving her two cents and John taking them into consideration and vice versa. John saw Abigail as an “intellectual equal” and valued her

⁶¹ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 163.

⁶² Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 163.

⁶³ Lynne Withey, *Dearest Friend A Life of Abigail Adams*, (New York: The Free Press, 1981), 58.

opinion.⁶⁴ Because of these circumstances, Abigail was better versed in politics than other women, and all without stepping out of her role as mother and dutiful wife. She gave birth to all five of her children during the period before the war began, when the Stamp Act, Townsend Act, and more were being fully enforced and society was changing daily. In one instance, she even physically saw the Patriots come into town to relocate all of the powder supplies because they were afraid the Loyalists would get their hands on them.⁶⁵ Abigail was in the thick of the revolution well before the fighting had begun.

Because of her situation as a Northern upper-class woman with a husband who traveled often, Abigail assumed the daily responsibilities of the household – another example of a woman who became a deputy husband. When John was away, which, because of the Continental Congress and then the revolution itself was for many years, Abigail was forced to make several decisions about the family farm they owned in Braintree, Massachusetts. Writers Lynne Withey and Edith Gelles paint a very realistic picture of any women at this time with this burden. Withey mentions that Abigail would write to her husband often with various questions about the farm and just life in general, as many things were newer responsibilities for her. Since letters took so long to travel from place to place, if they were even delivered at all, Abigail never received John's responses in time to make decisions. She was forced to take matters into her own hands entirely, including managing the farm, sending her children to school, and keeping the family alive and well.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Charles W. Akers, *Abigail Adams An American Woman*, ed. Oscar Handlin, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 32.

⁶⁵ Akers, *Abigail Adams An American Woman*, 34.

⁶⁶ Letters between Abigail and John took about two weeks to travel from Braintree to Philadelphia, where most of John's revolutionary work with the Continental Congress was located. John was noted to write less than Abigail did as he was very busy with political matters. In addition to the less frequent writing, letters took even longer to reach Abigail as John usually

Withey comments that Abigail “had to make many decisions on her own, and gradually she gained confidence in her ability to run the farm by herself” as well as other key deputy husband responsibilities.⁶⁷ Gelles documents Abigail’s rise to deputy husbandship saying that for around ten years, “Abigail served as the primary source of support for her family, a position to which she never adjusted comfortably; yet it was a function which she performed energetically and competently.”⁶⁸ She managed to keep the farm out of debt and even helped expand the property during her time as head of household, demonstrating just how much her thinking and responsibilities had grown. She not only held the farm together, but allowed it to thrive. Gelles sums up Abigail’s struggles well saying that as a woman who was not educated in agricultural pursuits or ready to take on an entire household, she “learned a new kind of work, and she learned under pressure.”⁶⁹ Abigail never technically left her socially accepted role, but rather, she was forced to carry more responsibility, which she accepted and excelled in.

Through her letters, it is evident that Abigail was an obedient and considerate wife.

Because she did not want to burden John with the farm affairs, Abigail would complain to her

sent his letters via private courier so no one else would read any sensitive contents. Abigail found writing to her husband, and writing in general, a stress reliever and a great time to organize all of her thoughts in one place.

⁶⁷ Withey, *Dearest Friend A Life of Abigail Adams*, 58.

⁶⁸ Edith B. Gelles, *Portia The World of Abigail Adams*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 37. ; Many historians have tried to portray deputy husbands as fearless women who did not need their husbands or male figures to lead them, when in reality, these drastic shifts from domesticity and obedience to decision making and responsibility left some women stunned or uneasy about their new roles. How could they be expected to know what to do if they had never been instructed in the ways of planting or running a business? It is refreshing to see Withey and Gelles describe Abigail’s hesitancy toward the farm, falling back on her husband’s guidance, and expressing her desire for John to come home. This did not mean that she or other deputy husbands did not enjoy their expanded roles, but that all deputy husbands had to learn by trial and error. They did not learn everything on the first try. This fact should be pointed out more frequently as the struggle gives even more value and strength to the term “deputy husband” at this time before the American Revolution.

⁶⁹ Gelles, *Portia The World of Abigail Adams*, 38.

friend, Mercy Otis Warren, about various things and relay less to John. She focused her letters more on the facts of the farm and the responsibilities that she was undertaking rather than worry him even more. For example, in one letter from April 1776, Abigail mentions that she is struggling to hire a new farm hand, but she focuses her writing more on the fact that she is busy and that she misses her husband. She writes, “I really am cumberd about many things and scarcely know which way to turn my-self. I miss my partner, and find myself uneaquil to the cares which fall upon me; I find it necessary to be the directress of our Husbandery and farming.”⁷⁰ Abigail, even though she has a lot to take care of and is struggling to learn and complete all of her daily tasks, is always lighthearted and joking in parts of her letters. She goes on to tell John that she, “in time [hopes] to have the Reputation of being as good a Farmeress as [her] partner has of being a good Statesmen”, meaning that as she becomes more well versed in farm responsibilities, she will attain the same greatness in farming that John has in politics.⁷¹

Many of the letters between John and Abigail also display Abigail’s wife-like nature as she wrote numerous letters of encouragement to her husband when he was annoyed with his job. John was specifically frustrated with the sluggish pace of the Continental Congress. He commented, “The Business of the Congress is tedious, beyond Expression. This Assembly is like no other that ever existed.”⁷² All of the delegates attending were great men who felt the need to each give their opinions for all issues addressed. Because of this, decision making was taking an unnecessarily long time. Abigail, when responding, always reassured him saying his position was important and the colonies were in need of his great guidance to not only begin a revolution,

⁷⁰ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 7 - 11 April 1776, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.

⁷¹ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 7 - 11 April 1776, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.

⁷² Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 9 October 1774, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.

but form a proper government after they won. She wrote things like, “Your task is difficult and important. Heaven direct and prosper you.” and “You cannot be, I know, nor do I wish to see you an inactive Spectator” even though she really wanted him to come home.⁷³ With her insight and encouragement, Abigail transformed the typical role of wife into a progressive, impactful role unique to only her and her husband.

In addition to her role as wife, Abigail was also a wonderful, active mother. She took her role as mother so seriously that at times she felt the job too great even for herself. According to Withey, “Abigail believed very seriously that mothers were primarily responsible for training their children to become moral, God-fearing, useful adults.”⁷⁴ Abigail took James Fordyce’s sermons to heart when he wrote about mothers and their lasting impact on their children (a concept still largely believed today). In one sermon, titled “On the Importance of Female Sex,” Fordyce states, “There is not perhaps in the whole science of female vanity, female luxury, or female falsehood, a single article that is not taught, and exemplified also by those Christian mothers, to the poor young creatures, whom every dictate of nature ... should engage their parents to bring up in modesty, sobriety, and simplicity of manners.”⁷⁵ Mothers were responsible for raising their children in the proper environment and through the correct perspective, one of poise and humility. As Fordyce wrote mostly from the typical male perspective about women and their roles in society, he used very traditional words concerning motherhood, which Abigail took to heart. In her eyes though, part of a mother’s impact on her

⁷³ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 15 August 1774, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. ; Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 16 October 1774, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.

⁷⁴ Withey, *Dearest Friend A Life of Abigail Adams*, 30.

⁷⁵ Fordyce, vol. 1 of *Sermons to Young Women: In Two Volumes*, 10.

children included an extensive education, something Abigail set out to personally accomplish in her household.

Education emerged as the most important aspect of being a mother, according to Abigail. Along with moral development, education would allow her children to grow up and think on their own, an extremely important quality that Abigail had become all too aware of as the revolutionary air thickened. In one letter from John to Abigail, he agreed wholeheartedly with her desire to educate their children saying,

Train them to Virtue, habituate them to industry, activity, and Spirit. Make them consider every Vice, as shamefull and unmanly: fire them with Ambition to be usefull-make them disdain to be destitute of any usefull, or ornamental Knowledge or Accomplishment. Fix their Ambition upon great and solid Objects, and their Contempt upon little, frivolous, and useless ones.⁷⁶

John wishes his children to pursue great things in their lives, things that can only be achieved with a proper education – one that combines regular academic rigor with the ideals that only a mother can teach her children. He wants them to develop a good conscience and strong drive. Just as Abigail looks for her children to grow up and do great things, so does John.

This dedication to education demonstrates Abigail's natural motherly qualities, while simultaneously using the traditional role as mother to propel her children farther in life. Some historians call her the first advocate for "Republican Motherhood," because it encompassed the duty that mothers had to educate their children. Only strongly taking root after the Revolution had ended, Republican Motherhood combined the idea of education with the important influence that women had over their families. Abigail realized this concept earlier than most, embodying

⁷⁶ Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 28 August 1774, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.

progressive attitudes for her time, even if she still operated within her prescribed role as “mother.”

Even though Abigail was a devoted wife and mother and adhered to her domestic role as much as she did her non-traditional role, she also expressed her own, progressive, mind, specifically when it came to politics. Abigail never held her tongue or watched her language when writing to her husband or close friends concerning her ideas about the revolution. She even mixed politics with her family life as “signed or unsigned, her letters bear the unmistakable marks of her perceptiveness, her total self-possession, and her artless but captivating personal style. Her reports from home mingle the momentous with the intimate – news of battles with requests for pins ... tart comments on generals and politicians with the prattle of her children, diplomacy with dress goods.”⁷⁷ She could not officially participate in any decision making, vote, or even have her voice be heard in the Continental Congress or local meetings because she was a woman. As Akers puts it, “[Women] enjoyed a political existence only in their relationship to men”, meaning that men had a voice and women could only be heard as far as their husbands and fathers heard them.⁷⁸ Abigail turned to family and friends to discuss the revolution. According to Withey, Abigail became quite colorful when attacking Great Britain. She had very anti-British sentiments and tended to see politics from the perspective of the “moral character of individuals,” judging all decisions based on the characteristics of vice and virtue.⁷⁹ In the beginning, she did not support the idea of war as she was afraid the colonies would lose

⁷⁷ Marc Friedlaender and Mary-Jo Kline, introduction to *The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of the Adams Family 1762-1784*, ed. L.H. Butterfield, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 8. Abigail’s letters encompassed everything from daily life to politics all the while keeping her personality and tone. At the time, they were a source of great untapped power and today, they are a complete gift to historians for their incredible insights to the time period as well as the life of the Adams family.

⁷⁸ Akers, *Abigail Adams An American Woman*, 32.

⁷⁹ Withey, *Dearest Friend A Life of Abigail Adams*, 48.

and have to settle for even less freedom in exchange for peace. However, once the war started, she prayed for an end to fighting, and more importantly the creation of a great new government – one that gave women more legal rights in their domestic sphere, a stance which she advocates for later on.

Abigail stands out in politics not so much because of her bold opinions, but because of how she used her ideas in a greater social way. Because she wanted to speak freely about the war and daily happenings, Abigail sought out other women, such as Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren, who specifically stepped outside of the framework that society assigned to them to become formal writers and thinkers. With these women, she could discuss her untraditional roles as deputy husband, the classical literature she had been reading, and of course the war and the negative effects it was having on the colonies from boycotts to physical fighting. These women, in return, discussed their own writings and truly opened Abigail's eyes to the nature of war and the potential that women had outside of their domestic duties. As Withey examines Macaulay's correspondence with Abigail, she says that "Abigail's comments to Macaulay were filled with revolutionary bravado," just like Abigail's comments in letters to her husband.⁸⁰ Both agreed that virtue of the American people and their striving to do the correct thing would help them win the war. With Warren, Abigail also discussed politics, most specifically the idea that too much power in the hands of a small group can lead to corruption.⁸¹ Both Macaulay and Warren gave Abigail the political outlet and also the platform that she needed with other women. Even though Abigail held a lesser role in the political realm, she used her social role to simultaneously influence others while also exposing herself to great change. Through this, she found her own power.

⁸⁰ Withey, *Dearest Friend A Life of Abigail Adams*, 50-51.

⁸¹ Withey, *Dearest Friend A Life of Abigail Adams*, 47.

When examining the correspondence between John and Abigail, it is important to see the power that came with letter writing. It might seem like just another common, daily occurrence, but for Abigail, it became a source of unrealized power – a platform for her to express her ideas and influence her husband’s perspectives. John relied completely upon her accounts of the war’s progression in Boston, Braintree, and the New England area. Newspapers were inconsistent sources for news while Abigail wrote truthfully and accurately. Philadelphia was not near much revolutionary activity so it was sometimes easy to forget that the war was occurring. Abigail’s letters about the fighting served as reminders to John and to all the delegates of the greater purpose of the Congress and the important political role each man played.⁸²

In addition to war happenings, Abigail used letter writing to express her political ideas. Feeling it inappropriate for women to discuss their opinions in an open political forum (no doubt an effect of her lack of consciousness that women could in fact gain power outside of the home at the time), she reserved her opinions for private. Only John and closest friends, such as Mercy Otis Warren, knew her true opinions about the war and women’s rights. Through these expressions, it can easily be seen that John was impacted by Abigail’s progressive thinking. She used jokes to subtly include some of her more progressive political ideologies into her letters to John, and at other times, she was completely direct with her statements such as calling for a revolution with Britain. Since John saw Abigail as an “intellectual equal” as mentioned earlier, he took his wife’s word into consideration as “she presented herself as the whetstone on which to sharpen his ideas.”⁸³ In their relationship, John could expect his ideas to be refined by Abigail’s own opinions.

⁸² Withey, *Dearest Friend A Life of Abigail Adams*, 59.

⁸³ Akers, *Abigail Adams An American Woman*, 32-33.

Even though she only saw her actions as being a dutiful wife and giving her husband encouragement and ideas as he navigated uncharted waters on his way to a revolution in fact, Abigail became, through John, a quiet, but essential mind in the Congress. One of Abigail Adams' most iconic ideas to John concerns itself with the very concept of women in their domestic sphere. She could not have predicted at the time that it would have such lasting effects and gain so much publicity as to name her "an early representative of the women's rights movement," a "feminist," and a woman "ahead of her time."⁸⁴ In a letter to John in 1776, Abigail takes the opportunity to express her ideas about women needing domestic protection from all powerful men and husbands in the new laws that the Congress will be creating after the war. She writes, "by the way in the new 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 hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could."⁸⁵ She called for a restriction on the power that men had to control women in the household. Akers believes that Abigail did not want a change in male and female roles, but rather, wanted more legal rights for women in order for them to be able to access their full potential within their domestic, traditional spheres.⁸⁶ What Abigail did not realize was that by giving women more room to act domestically, there was now even more of an opportunity for them to use their roles to gain a foothold in society. Abigail was advocating for more women's power, and within her own sphere no less. However, she did not recognize that her own actions potentially impacted other women.

⁸⁴ Gelles, *Portia The World of Abigail Adams*, 47.

⁸⁵ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March - 5 April 1776, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.

⁸⁶ Akers, *Abigail Adams An American Woman*, 43.

Just the proposition of this “outrageously radical” idea, for the time, demonstrates Abigail’s awareness that, as the wife of a major political figure, she can influence policy.⁸⁷ This shows major power in and of itself. Norton agrees here saying that Abigail “demonstrated an unusual sensitivity to the possibly egalitarian resonances of revolutionary ideology and showed an awareness of implications that seem to have escaped the motive of American men.”⁸⁸ She goes so far as to elevate Abigail’s thinking above that of men for the time as they needed to be reminded that this revolution is not only for their population, but for all people, including women. Historians such as Woody Holton point out that Abigail was writing the letter to only one person, her husband, and that she was only addressing one topic, marriage.⁸⁹ It would be remiss, however, to ignore the fact that John essentially scoffed at this proposal and moved on to what he regarded as more important political matters such as slavery.

It is not his response that historians should be looking at, but rather, the action that Abigail took. Was she conscious of the magnitude of her suggestion? Abigail may have understood that she could discuss radical ideas with her husband and possibly influence his decision, but just this idea of women gaining more political power exhibits Abigail’s larger impact on other elite women. She became the voice of many collective women and demonstrated the extent that women could voice their opinions at the time. Showing them that they could potentially impact society in their own right, Abigail did much more than merely suggest an idea to John. She proposed a new way of thinking for many women, she just did not see her efforts from this larger viewpoint. Even though they were not granted their request, women like Abigail left behind their thoughts for later generations to evaluate and build upon.

⁸⁷ Edith B. Gelles, *“First Thoughts”*: *Life and Letters of Abigail Adams*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 16.

⁸⁸ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 227.

⁸⁹ Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams*, (New York: Free Press, 2009), 99.

Historians are very quick to comment about Abigail and her true desire to be a domestic woman. Based on her life's actions, she was anything but a homebody. Because of John's career and time away from home, Abigail was forced into greater responsibilities, such as taking care of the farm and making sure that the family did not incur any debt, along with keeping her husband up to date on revolutionary happenings near and around their home. What historians fail to mention is that Abigail lacked the *consciousness* that her roles were in fact progressive. Because Abigail operated within what she perceived to be the traditional sphere prescribed to women, she did not see how very untraditional her actions and bold ideas were, never mind how influential they were to other women. Anything seen as outside of typical women's roles was considered a necessary patriotic act in her eyes. She even mentions this idea in a letter to John when she says, "My Soul is unambitious of pomp or power ... tho I have been calld to sacrifice to my Country, I can glory in my Sacrifice"⁹⁰ When examining Abigail's influence, she was truly a progressive woman of her time who, even if unknowingly, used the traditional domestic sphere as a wedge to slowly gain power.

Eliza Lucas Pinkney: A Woman Determined to Use Her Education

Eliza Lucas Pinckney an upper-class woman and ground breaking agriculturalist in South Carolina, is an example of a woman who brings her already broad roles to new, more socially acceptable, heights as not only a deputy husband, but a "husband" in her own right. She not only reshaped and broadened the scope of her roles even when her husband returned like Barker and Pinckney do, but even became her own head of household and pushed for more opportunities for women than others were willing to do. Barker, Adams, and Pinckney recast their roles to the extent that they are not the same once the Revolution begins, but Pinckney takes extra steps to

⁹⁰ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 18 May 1778, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*.

push her roles further by owning land that was not necessarily hers, experimenting with and successfully growing a cash crop, and not remarrying after her husband's death.

Before Pinckney could claim these new roles, she had to be educated. Many upper-class women believed in their own education and bettering themselves to impact society and other people they came into contact with. Pinckney discusses her own education in one of her letters to a friend, Miss Bartlett. As she is describing her daily schedule, she mentions that she practices things like music, French, and shorthand so that she will not forget them. She writes, "The first hour after breakfast is spent at my musick, the next is constantly employed in recolecting something I have learned least for want of practise it should be quite lost, such as French and short hand."⁹¹ She even goes so far as to say that she is teaching two black girls to read along with her younger sister, known as Polly.⁹² This goes directly against what most people believed women should do at that time because many were not educated enough to read and write.⁹³ It is important to include that Pinckney still participates in traditional household skills such as needlework, but this letter suggests that she also uses her time in other ways as well – ways that Joseph Addison would likely agree with.

It is essential to note that Eliza Lucas Pinckney cannot, by any means, be classified as a typical Southern woman. The traditional upper-class woman in South Carolina at this time is considered an elite British colonist. According to Anne Goodwyn Jones, the South's ideologies concerning women entailed that, "All deny to women authentic selfhood; all enjoin that women suffer and be still; all portray women as sexually pure, pious, deferent to external authority, and

⁹¹ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 34.

⁹² *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 34.

⁹³ These more progressive and educated women are key for present day historians because without them, there would be no written record of daily events and happenings in women's lives. There primary sources say so much in so little words.

content with their place in the home.”⁹⁴ With this, Jones connects a Southern elite woman to that of a British elite woman. Women were only allowed domestic responsibility, including taking care of children, and, of course, satisfying their husbands. They were supposed to be submissive to authority and be satisfied with the position they were given. The evaluation of a Southern belle was based on the idea that “her strength in manners and morals is contingent . . . upon her submission to their sources—God, the patriarchal church, her husband—and upon her staying out of public life, where she might interfere in their formulation.”⁹⁵ With this statement, it is clear that Southern women should have no place outside of the home, especially not in public life where they could possibly get involved in a man’s business, or worse, God’s business. They were to stay dutiful to husbands, families, and the social constructs laid out for them.

Unlike this limiting framework, Pinckney was not one to disregard her potential as an educated woman in society. As her letters state, she can read, write, speak French, and play music. She also played a major role in the success of her family’s land because she “ran the large household, supervised her father’s estates in his lengthy absences, [and] experimented with new crops.”⁹⁶ Just as the other two women, Pinckney too became a deputy husband, taking on more responsibility as the woman and also the man of the household.

In her letters, it is evident that Pinckney is using deputy husbandship to push for more land ownership and decision making. Pinckney mentions that she has begun a “large plantation of Oaks” which she even sees as her “own property, whether [her] father plans to give [her] the

⁹⁴ Anne Goodwyn Jones and Charles Reagan Wilson, 2009, “Belles and Ladies,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 13: Gender*, ed. Nancy Bercau and Ted Ownby, University of North Carolina Press, 43.

http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616728_bercau.13.

⁹⁵ Jones and Wilson, “Belles and Ladies,” 42.

⁹⁶ Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women’s Eyes An American History With Documents Volume One: To 1900*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2012), 92.

land or not.”⁹⁷ This bold thinking demonstrates Pinckney’s ability to push the boundaries of deputy husbandship to its limits. Owning property was extremely uncommon for women at this time, but Pinckney was determined to successfully cultivate her own land. She continues speaking about the oaks and their eventual increase in cost as shipbuilding becomes a regular craft. “I design many years hence when oaks are more valuable than they are now – which you know they will be when we come to build fleets.”⁹⁸ This foresight exhibits Pinckney’s great smarts in making progressive decisions about planting. She also, not so subtly, claims land as her own.

This future thinking and investing shows that Pinckney is not only educated, but that she has a knack for agriculture and economics. She did not just stay in the house and take care of children or master household skills, but rather, she immersed herself in more fruitful pursuits that gave her some power and influence in society. At times there was so much work that Pinckney would write to Bartlett that she could not visit with her because she had “so much business on [her] hands at present [she] hardly [knew] which to turn to [herself].”⁹⁹ In her role as deputy husband, Pinckney could exercise her home skills and her agricultural skills simultaneously while ensuring her respectable (and influential) place among South Carolinians.

The desire to remain educated and involved in her father’s agricultural affairs stemmed from her upbringing. Not only is she not a typical Southern elite woman, but she only became a Southerner at the age of fifteen when her family moved from Antigua, where she was born, to South Carolina. Because her father was a British Army officer stationed in Antigua, Pinckney was exposed to the culture there as well as the culture in England, where she attended school for

⁹⁷ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 38.

⁹⁸ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 38.

⁹⁹ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 37.

several years.¹⁰⁰ Historians might assume that she would be more accustomed to the British social class orders that carried over to the colonies in their development, but she was determined to forego the traditional framework, and instead become a successful woman on her own.

This success is most largely attributed to Pinckney's introduction of indigo to the colonies. A cash crop that was eventually used as a dye for clothes and fabrics in England and other European countries, indigo became a very prized commodity. Her father would send indigo seeds from the West Indies to plant on the plantations. Rice was a cash crop in the South at this time in the mid-18th century, but it was heavy to ship internationally. South Carolina needed a new crop and indigo was their ticket to an economic boost. If it was not for Pinckney's determination and vigilance over several years of attempted planting, indigo would not have become the second largest cash crop in the Southern colonies. Pinckney mentions the indigo several times in her letters, specifically when corresponding with her father. She comments that she "had greater hopes from the Indigo" and would like the seeds sent to her earlier next planting season.¹⁰¹ She explains in a later letter to her father that she needs to plant the seeds by the end of March. It seems Pinckney was having trouble drying the plants in order to use them for dye before the colder weather set in. For several years, the indigo crop succumbed to the elements and only small amounts of indigo were collected. The correct planting time was essential for the indigo to prosper. Pinckney was hopeful though as she tells her father, "We can do nothing towards [the lost crop] now but make the works ready for next year."¹⁰² Once Pinckney effectively grew the indigo and exported it to other countries, other plantation owners began to see its potential worth as well. "Indigo culture spread quickly, for the gold-leafed plant pointed

¹⁰⁰ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, xv.

¹⁰¹ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 8.

¹⁰² *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 16.

the path to plantation affluence.”¹⁰³ Thanks to Eliza Pinckney’s vision, her family and much of South Carolina could reap the benefits of indigo growth.

Pinkney not only kept herself busy with agricultural responsibilities, but she also took advantage of her father’s personal legal library where she became well versed in some legal matters. One letter makes mention of a widow who asks Pinckney to be a trustee for her land and even tries to get her to write up a marriage settlement, but Pinckney refuses on account that the widow had enough money to hire a more skilled professional. Pinckney specifically explained her conscience to Miss Bartlett when it came to helping neighbors with legal matters saying, “what can I do if a poor creature lies dying and their family takes it in their head that I can serve them. I cant refuse; but when they are well and able to employ a lawyer, I always shall.”¹⁰⁴ Pinckney cannot help but assist those that need it most and cannot afford a regular lawyer. Otherwise she is just too busy with other matters and explains that she is simply not as well-versed as a lawyer in instances where one can be afforded. More important than the marriage settlement, Pinckney seems extremely proud to tell her friend a secret: she has already drawn up two wills. She writes, “I know I have done no harm for I coned my lessons very perfect” as she goes on to list essential aspects of the wills.¹⁰⁵ At this juncture, Pinckney is not only well versed in agricultural ventures, she is also knowledgeable about law.

These pursuits do not suggest that Pinckney did not balance her regular motherly duties with her new responsibilities. After Eliza married Charles Pinckney, they had four children – three sons and one daughter – all of whom were educated except for one son, George, who died when he was very young. Elise Pinckney, a descendent of Eliza who helped edit her letters,

¹⁰³ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, xix.

¹⁰⁴ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 41.

¹⁰⁵ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 41.

noted that “[Eliza’s] gratification with the marriage and her delight in the children that soon followed seemed to make her life even more challenging and satisfying.”¹⁰⁶ In the 1750s, the Pinckney family traveled to England for a few years so that the children could receive a proper education. In letters to friends, Pinckney notes her happiness on settling in England after the struggles of finding “a tolerable unfurnished house” and making new acquaintances.¹⁰⁷ Of course there were challenges that Pinckney also faced, especially illness. In one particular letter, she writes about one of her sons contracting some sort of infection in his glands due to standing outside in a cold wind for too long.¹⁰⁸ Once the Seven Years War broke out in 1756, Charles Pinckney thought it best to travel back to South Carolina to sell the plantation and invest in safer land somewhere else. Having to leave her sons Charles and Thomas in England for two years caused Eliza much worry, but she needed to return to Carolina to take care of the plantation with her daughter Harriott. Pinckney says, “What I have suffered and do still suffer in the expectation of parting with all my dear children for 2 or 3 year.”¹⁰⁹ These happy comments and concerns seem like those of a conventional mother and Pinckney is no exception. This maternal compassion stays with Pinckney throughout the rest of her life, even when her children are grown.

When Charles Pinckney contracted and died from malaria in 1758, Eliza again took on the agricultural and economic responsibilities of a plantation and kept the estate and land prosperous in a deputy husband role. Elise again commented on the situation saying, “[Eliza’s] fight to perpetuate the family, its wealth, and its standing within the community required all of

¹⁰⁶ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 73.

¹⁰⁷ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 80.

¹⁰⁸ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 84.

¹⁰⁹ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 87.

her energies.”¹¹⁰ It was very beneficial to have all of the past knowledge from her own family’s plantation to help with her own, along with her understanding of the law, and even her respected position in society.

Throughout this last period of her life, Pinckney, according to Elise, devoted most of her time to continuing to instill in her sons, Thomas and Charles, “their late father’s love and hopes for them and their duty to work hard and live morally orthodox lives for the sake of the family. Duty, piety, moral virtue, filial reverence – these were the concepts Eliza pressed upon her sons” (who were thousands of miles away studying in England).¹¹¹ It is in these later letters that readers see Pinckney’s true motherly nature emerge. In one letter to Charles, Pinckney describes happiness as being “patient, humble, and resigned ... a noble soul, a mind out of reach of Envy, malice, and every Calamity.”¹¹² She continues saying, “the earlier, my dear boy, you learn this lesson, the longer will you be wise and happy.”¹¹³ When it is time for Charles to attend university, Pinckney not only gives him her opinions of several universities in England, but also cautions him about his temper as it “is often productive of the greatest mischiefs and misfortunes.”¹¹⁴ Pinckney constantly impresses on both her sons the need for a good education, which is very reflective of her own self education. For Charles, she explains, “I would not hesitate a moment were it in my choice whether I would have you a learned man with every accomplishment or a good man without any.”¹¹⁵ Thomas is always reminded by his mother to “be a good child, mind your learning” as he also receives a higher education.¹¹⁶ Education is

¹¹⁰ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 91.

¹¹¹ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 92.

¹¹² *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 168.

¹¹³ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 168.

¹¹⁴ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 159.

¹¹⁵ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 159.

¹¹⁶ *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney, 161.

equated with success, and rightfully so as Pinckney herself demonstrated how successful one can be, even as a woman in this time. Her sons are able to go much farther with their more flexible and free social framework.

After evaluating her life through her writings, it is clear that Eliza Lucas Pinckney mastered the art of pushing her boundaries as a woman. She used society's stereotypical perceptions of women, turned them on their heads, and demonstrated that a woman with an education had the potential to benefit an entire society. In Pinckney's case, this is evident in indigo production. Pinckney displayed this desire for education and economic success for her family's plantation all the while still working within the role of deputy husband. She was a great mother and showed, through her letters, the worries and happiness that come along with that role. She always obeyed her husband even when he proposed they move to England and eventually back to South Carolina. When he passed, she held his reigns and took his responsibility instead of being a helpless widow, whose stories are all too familiar to historians. Her motherly advice and watchful eye did not stop at this point either. Pinckney maintained both domestic and economic power simultaneously. She respected her motherly and domestic duties, but also became a woman of great power. Her fine balance between traditional woman and agricultural innovator is what makes her so notable for the time.

Conclusion

White upper-class women used the framework society had originally assigned them in the household, turned it on its head during a vulnerable time for the colonies, and gradually enlarging their traditional role, were able to push their boundaries into broader social and political spheres. The emerging revolution led to constantly changing social roles, decreased

male presence in the household, and increased female awareness of the war. This expansion of traditional roles of women began to widen their social sphere and allowed for more direct political participation. The increased political situation allowed elite women to use their own skills to make a political contribution, like producing homespun; at the same time, they continued to use their traditional influence over their husbands and their roles of housewifery as a wedge to gain increased power.

Of these more fluid roles, two in particular, deputy husbandship and Republican Motherhood, gave women a socially acceptable justification for their changing responsibilities and attempts to impact society in a larger way than their original, narrower sphere allowed. Women such as Penelope Barker, Abigail Adams, and Eliza Lucas Pinckney demonstrate how these ideologies can all uniquely present themselves in individual women's lives. All together, they allow women more political participation during an integral time for the colonies without jeopardizing their status as elite, upper-class women in society. Women were able to expand on their femininity, motherhood, and domestic life without having to sacrifice or cast them aside. They were allowed to purely add to their already structured roles.

These select women, while they may not have made overarching changes for all of their gender, laid the stepping stones that later women built upon. The ideologies proposed and embodied by Barker, Adams, and Pinckney were left behind in their correspondences, documents, conversations with friends, and their role model behaviors for future women to explore. Without these women calling attention to their need for an education and their political value outside of the household, they would have never been able to influence others and gain any power.

Just as Eliza Lucas Pinckney was not afraid to challenge her roles even further, so too did future women who were impacted by these new teachings. Pinckney's daughter, Harriott Pinckney Horry, became a deputy husband in her own right as she managed her husband's rice plantation. Harriott grew up in a household surrounded by women – her mother and female friends. She acquired Eliza's interest in letter writing and often corresponded with her brother Thomas, who was close in age. Harriott essentially watched and learned from her mother not only in the typical domestic role, but also in much larger roles like “[overseeing] the domestic economy of several plantations where provisions for food, lodging, and health care had to be made for two or three hundred people.”¹¹⁷ Harriott became a trained deputy husband and expanded her role even before she married her husband, Daniel Horry in 1768. While Harriott's education may have been different from that of her brothers, she none the less received a much broader education than many elite upper-class daughters at the time. She witnessed her mother as the outlier, pushing boundaries right to their acceptable limits for the time. She then used these observations and skills later on to become a deputy husband of her own rice plantation after her husband was called to war during the revolution. Eliza's motherhood extended well beyond just her teachings, but her own actions served as examples for her daughter, as well as her sons, of the potential that women had. This speaks to the more general notion that even though women may not have impacted their entire gender in great strides, at the very least, they changed the perceptions of their children. Harriott, who saw her mother in expanded roles, began her own life in a very different place than her mother did. Not only did these deputy husbands and mothers greatly impact other women around them, but more importantly, they guided the next generation – their children – to a reformed, better educated position in society.

¹¹⁷ Schultz, “Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry: A South Carolina Revolutionary-Era Mother and Daughter,” 94.

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