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**WOMEN WHO HAD THE EARS OF THE FOUNDING
FATHERS**

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ABSTRACT

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The object of this undergraduate thesis is to cover the period of the Revolutionary War. It was the time when the thirteen colonies in North America wanted to break free from Britain.

The thesis is separated into two main sections. The first section called Cultural Background is divided into three parts. It demonstrates the women society in pre-revolutionary period and compares it with the position of women during the Revolutionary War. Finally, it refers to the development of women society in post-revolutionary period. The second section of the thesis is called The First First Ladies of the United States of America. This section refers to two first First Ladies, firstly to Martha Washington and secondly to Abigail Adams. There are described their important contributions to the Revolutionary War and to the creation of a new nation. Finally, there is the summarization of the whole thesis including the results of the thesis in the conclusion part.

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INTRODUCTION

The American Revolution was a political turning point in which the thirteen colonies of North America joined together to break away from the British Empire. This Revolution was a brave undertaking of the American men who wanted liberty and freedom. Obviously, the Revolution was the consequence of the escalating crisis where the crucial point was the Boston Tea Party which is believed to be the trigger for open Rebellion. Regrettably, British oversees colonies in America were not taken very seriously and often their needs were taken lightly by the British Government in London. So it was not really a surprise when the American colonies wanted to gain freedom from Britain and from the unfriendly king. “No taxation without representation!” (Berkin, 2006, p. 12), could be heard as crowds threatened royal officials and destroyed their property. The slogan was the motto of the newly developing nation. This time was very demanding both for men and women and only the strong in mind and physical condition could really survive the Revolution. Even though the Revolution began slowly, it got into an incredible speed and great passion in 1775. Apart from this, the Revolution itself was a baby who only started to walk with the help of the Founding Fathers. It is well known the Founding Fathers were all very important and strongly opinioned men and the creators of the colonial independence from Great Britain in the written form of *The Declaration of Independence*. But who were those men who had taken the leading roles and tried to take a step beyond their dreams? They were the men who united the American States. The most significant personalities that could be found among them were George Washington, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Each of them was of a different character, abilities and talents, however, there was one thing they had in common and it was their life devotion into the creation of the United States of America. As every baby has a father and mother, so did the American Revolution. The main Fathers are named above but how about the Mothers? During the time of the Revolution when men were founding the nation, women were pushed to rethink ideological norms. Berkin (2006) gives a very good example in her book concerning the women’s part of the story: “The men and women who lived through the Revolution have a very different story to tell” (p. 3). The war for independence is portrayed as an exclusively male event, however, women participated in the struggle for independence as well. Mr Ward (1999) states in his book that “the women were denied not only full rights as citizens but also unfettered self-determination affecting their everyday lives” (p. 164). It was

believed that women should not have the rights to even vote and were under the constant protection of their husbands. The Revolution, however, forced women to step into the professions and duties of their men who were often absent. These women saved their family properties from bankruptcy, controlled their households and made important decisions that belonged originally only to men. Nevertheless, the Revolution began with protests against taxation and a growing fear that Parliament and even the king intended to enslave their own citizens. As a result, women and girls were partners with their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons in the public demonstrations against the new British policies. If they were absent from the halls of the colonial legislatures, their presence was crucial in the most effective protest strategy of all: the boycott of British manufactured goods.

A lot has already been said about the Founding Fathers and their achievements, however, how far would they really have gone without the help and support of their wives and daughters? I would like to aim my thesis at the important roles women played in creating a new nation. How much of the fame and gratitude do they in reality deserve for the Revolution? Perhaps they have been terribly neglected from the public fame. Moreover, I would like to demonstrate the importance of women in the lives of the Founding Fathers. How far did they dare to go to influence their fathers or husbands? Did the Founding Fathers take into consideration any of their suggestions and pleadings? The major purpose of the thesis is to analyse those women participating in the creation of the new nation and the transformation of women's society.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Women in pre-revolutionary society

The pre-revolutionary society was predominantly governed by men. The man was at the top, the lord of the fireside, then came the mistress, his wife and helpmate. The English society believed: "That women were created by God to be helpmates to men, same as Eve was made as a helpmate to Adam" (Berkin, 2005, p. 4). Each family was represented in the outside world by its male head who was also in charge of family finances and predominantly oversaw the upbringing of the children. The woman's role was simple and private, as a mistress of the household, she directed the daily life and followed the orders of her husband. Benjamin Franklin once told men: "It would be just and prudent to inform and consult a wife before making very important decisions about monetary matters" (Norton, 1996, p. 5). Also Cloe Spaith (2012) explains the status of women in the pre-revolutionary society:

Women were considered legally dead once they were married under common. Once married, they legally became one with their husbands. Married women had no control of their earnings, inheritance, property, and also could not appear in court as a witness nor vote. Their husbands, therefore, were responsible for all aspects of their wife including discipline. (para. 2)

However, there was a significant difference between the lives of urban women and their rural counterparts. Urban women devoted less of their time to the household work, which they mostly did in the mornings and the rest of the day they had for visiting friends, riding, or perhaps reading quietly at home. The household work in the mornings resembled those of farm wives. They devoted to washing and ironing, cooking and baking, sewing and knitting. Although urban women did not have to dedicate all their days to the household work, they still did not turn their lives into leisured ones. Moreover, the only ones who could be described as leisured were the urban daughters who were not expected to contribute as much work to the household as did their rural counterparts. City daughters from well-to-do homes were able to live at a more relaxed pace, sleeping late, learning music and dancing, spending hours with male and female friends, and reading the latest novels (Norton, 1996, pp. 22 - 24). These young women were entirely idle and decorative,

however, they did extensive amounts of sewing for their families. Girls began to sew at an early age and they thereafter devoted many hours each day to their needles. Most of their tasks were mundane: mending and altering clothes, making shirts for their fathers and brothers, and stitching apparently innumerable aprons, caps, and shifts for themselves, their mothers, and their aunts. Since sewing was not easily portable, and because they lived so close to each other, well-to-do urban girls frequently gathered to work in sizable groups. While one of their number read, usually from a popular novel, the others would pass the afternoon or evening in sewing. Even though city girls could afford to have plenty of leisure time, they still had to learn the mysteries of housewifery taught by their mothers. Norton (1996), an American historian and Professor of American History Department of History at Cornell University, gives an example of this:

Daughters did some cooking, baking, and cleaning, helped to care for younger siblings, and on occasion took charge of the household. Sometimes they acquired this responsibility only when their mothers became ill, but in other cases adults deliberately adopted it as a training device. Abigail Adams, who believed it “an indispensable requisite, that every American wife, should herself know, how to order, and regulate her family”. (p. 25)

Evidently, there is a key difference in the domestic roles of urban and rural girls. Farm daughters learned to perform household tasks because their families' current well-being required their active involvement in daily work, whereas city girls acquired domestic skills primarily so that they could eventually become good wives and mothers. The distinction was crucial. Urban daughters participated sporadically in household tasks as a preparation for their own futures, but farm girls worked regularly at such chores as a direct contribution to their families' immediate well-fare. Although urban women were not burdened with the major stock-tending and clothmaking chores that devolved upon farm wives, some of the time thus saved was devoted to cleaning their homes. Many of the travelers in rural areas most horrified by dirty farmhouses and taverns were the urban women, who had adopted standards of cleanliness for their homes, clothes, and beds that were utterly alien to farm wives.

Cleaning, though, was perhaps the only occupation at which city dwellers of moderate means expended more energy than women living in agricultural regions. Mary

Beth Northon (1996) clearly states in her book, “If a farm woman was not willing to invest almost superhuman effort in the enterprise, keeping her household clean was an impossible task” (p. 12). Also Carol Berkin (2006), Presidential Professor of History at Baruch College states in her book: “A suitable marriage was, of course, the *raison d’être* behind a young woman’s mastery of dancing, fine needlework, and French. Wealthy girls understood that a woman’s happiness depends entirely on the husband she is united to” (p. 9).

Furthermore, spinning was a very proper accomplishment for rural daughters as it was crucial to the success of a farm household. Rural women spent much of their lives spinning. They began as girls, helping their mothers, they continued after their marriages, until their own daughters were old enough to remove most of the burden from their shoulders, and they often returned to it in old age or widowhood, as a means of supporting themselves or making use of their time. Spinning has become a significant occupation and symbol of femininity. Even when Benjamin Franklin sought a wedding present for his sister Jane, he decided on a spinning wheel instead of a tea table, concluding that: “The character of a good housewife was far preferable to that of being only a pretty gentlewoman” (Norton, 1996, p. 18). Another very distinguished group of eighteenth-century women were the wealthy southern women. Those women were directly responsible for even fewer household tasks than northerners with comparable means. Mary Beth Norton (1996) mentions in her book the resemblance between the daily schedules of mistresses of large plantations and wealthy urban women in the North, with the exception of the fact that social visits were confined to one or two afternoons a week because of the distance between plantations. The mornings were devoted to household affairs, although white southerners spent their time supervising the work of slaves instead of doing such chores themselves (pp. 25-27). The mistress of the household could spend some time reading or playing music before joining her husband for dinner in early to mid-afternoon. Afterward, she would normally turn to needlework until evening, and then again to reading and writing.

American continent involved plantation mistresses in varied activities, almost always in the role of director rather than performer. What were small-scale operations on northern farms were magnified many times on southern plantations. Consequently the primary task of young girls from wealthy southern families was to gain expertise in

running large estates. Even Thomas Jefferson advised: “His younger daughter, Maria, who was usually called Polly, that she should know how to manage the kitchen, the dairy, the garden, and other appendages of the household” (Norton, 1996, p. 28).

Generally, women did not contribute to the wider society and were expected to be confined to the domestic sphere. They were supposed to be good wives, mothers as well as housekeepers and above all they should always be content and grateful for their position in life. However, whether they were rural or urban wives or the mistresses of southern plantations they had one thing in common, and it was their femininity and their total dependence on their fathers or their husbands. Moreover, they were not expected to interfere into the politics which was taken as male matter. Not much would have changed if the Revolution had not been famously started by the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773.

Women during the Revolutionary War

They say it was the Tea that caused the Revolution. But in truth, according to the historical events it seems that it is mostly all the Seven Coercive Acts, passed by the British Parliament in 1774, which were the source of conflict. These Acts played an important role in the development and growth of the American Revolution. All the years that led up to the Revolution, the women were really the critical agents involved in the boycotts. They were the consumers and none of those boycotts would have ever been successful unless women had agreed not to buy clothes, not to buy tea and they did it with great enthusiasm. What is more, they signed public documents saying they would not drink tea which was really remarkably radical thing for women to do and to have their names in the paper saying “I stand for liberty”. Nevertheless, the women were critical players even before the Revolution had taken place. This could have been considered treason. Professor Freeman (2012) from Yale concludes her lecture by emphasizing the fact that:

Some of the daily actions of women became politicize during the Revolution. And there also existed some women who were much more political and went further than the rest of them. These women were drafting petitions, participated in mass political events and in 1780 they created and run amazingly successful campaign to raise money for Washington’s continental army. (Yale courses)

As mentioned above, most of the women's domestical activities became politically important during the Revolution. Such acts as non-drinking British tea or non-ordering clothes from England were suddenly major weapons in the hands of patriotically thinking women. After all, they were the mistresses of the domestic economy and it was completely up to them to decide what to buy or not for the daily consumption of one's household. The Intolerable Acts placed by the British parliament in 1774 relating to Britain's colonies in North America caused important developments in the growth of the American Revolution. All of these acts were placed as a response to the Boston Tea Party event and were seen as a threat to the colonists' liberties. However, preceding this event, there already existed boycotts where women were also included. The first time that women publicly boycotted British goods happened as a result to the Stamp Act of 1765 that required that government-issued stamps to be placed on all legal documents and newspapers as well as playing cards and dice. As the Congress agreed to boycott of all British-made goods until the tax was repealed, the women were asked to become the crucial part in the first organized opposition to British policy. Carol Berkin (2006) emphasized the importance of the women's actions in her book:

American women were not present in the halls of the Virginia House of Burgesses....They did not gather in the dockside taverns of Boston where the wily Samuel Adams helped transform the city's local gangs into the Sons of Liberty. And their opinions were not sought when delegates to the Stamp Act Congress composed their arguments against direct taxation, penned their petitions to Parliament, and decided on their strategy to force the act's repeal. But when the call went out for a boycott of British goods, women became crucial participants...the first political act of American women was to say "No". (p. 13)

Their refusal had an immediate and powerful effect as women were the major consumers and purchasers. Moreover, "in New York City a group of brides-to-be said no to their fiancés and put a public notice in the local newspaper that they would not marry men who applied for a stamped marriage license" (Berkin, 2006, p. 14). Furthermore, in 1767, when the British chancellor of the exchequer, Charles Townshend, tried to expand import duties to include British-made goods such as paper, paint, and tea, colonists were

quick to organize opposition. Women were, once again, asked to use their purchasing power as a political weapon. As Norton (1996) states: “Male leaders recognized that they needed women’s cooperation to ensure that Americans would comply with the request to forgo the use of tea and luxury goods until the act was repealed” (p. 157).

In spite of the fact that never before had female Americans formally shouldered the responsibility of a public role, never before had they claimed a voice in public policy three hundred women had promised to totally abstain from the use of tea and after the meeting of Edenton Ladies’ Tea Party an agreement was signed by fifty-one female North Carolinians which proclaimed the ladies duty, “To do every thing as far as lies in our power to support the public good” (Norton, 1996, 161). Or as Berkin (2006) paraphrases their voices:

As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears nearly to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and as it has been thought necessary, for the public good, to enter into several resolves by a meeting of members deputed from the whole province, it is a duty which we owe, not only to our near and dear connections, who have concurred in them, but to ourselves, who are essentially interested in their welfare, to do everything, as far as lies in our power, to testify our sincere adherence to the same, and we do therefore accordingly subscribe this paper as a witness of our fixed intentions and solemn determination. (p. 21)

On the contrary, the Edenton Ladies wanted to make it clear to the public that they acted out of a duty to the husbands and family who shared their patriotism. They still felt the need of asking their husbands for permission. They might have been right expressing this fact as there were some conservative men for whom as Berkin (2006) emphasized in her book: “The Edenton Ladies Agreement was comparable with social anarchy as the Boston Tea Party” (p. 23). Generally, the Edenton Ladies’ Tea Party was an important turning point in American women’s political perceptions, signalling the start of a process through which they would eventually come to regard themselves as participants in the politics rather than as females with purely private concerns. With the emergence of an event that encompassed the political, social, and domestic worlds of colonial America, women began to seek different avenues in which to become “more useful” to the world.

Although women did not appear within the inner circles of Congress, they began to use their unique talents to support the Revolution and express their changing roles.

The women of Philadelphia especially took this notion to heart. Esther De Berdt Reed organized the Ladies Association of Philadelphia active from 1780-1781, and effectively brought women together for the revolutionary cause. By creating a public place for women to congregate within the accepted boundaries imposed by eighteenth-century standards, the Ladies Association made a significant contribution to the war effort and also established a political agency that would impact future generations of women. To fully understand the course taken by colonial women, it is crucial to delve into the realm of eighteenth-century femininity. According to Mary Beth Norton (1996), “Uppermost in women’s mind was the very fact of their feminine identity” (p. 111). If a colonial woman wished to discuss education, she did so within the context of education for the female sex. Their entire identity became wrapped up in their gender. Femininity, and everything associated with it, composed women’s identity. They did not view their lives or their circumstances as opposed to men, but to other women. The female gender existed within its own definition and did not step outside the boundaries and into those of men. However, in Karin Wulf’s study (2000) of women in colonial Philadelphia, she argues that a significant amount of women lived in households in which the patriarchal system deviated from its traditional role (pp. 116 – 117).

Eventually, gender and political expression became irrevocably entwined. Women formed themselves into groups such as the Whigh Association of the Unmarried Ladies of America in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. This Association specifically relied on their gender to make a promise not to, “Give their hand in marriage to any gentleman until he had first proved himself a patriot” (Meyer, 1976, p. 132). Not only did this personify the domestic role of a woman fulfilling her gender’s obligations to become a wife, but it also established a political voice for women. As the men in the Old World passed their laws, the women in the New World organized against them. Although they were sometimes allowed into the male arena of labour and business, politics still remained relatively within the grasp of men in the public sphere. Therefore, there is no surprise that women tended to apologize for their gender when speaking of politics. For instance, Ann Gwinnett, widow of the president of Georgia, wrote a warning to the Continental Army of possible traitorous activities in the ranks of the Georgia troops. At the end of her letter, she confessed, “These things (from a

Woman, it is not our sphere, yet I cannot help it) are all true” (Kerber, 2001, p. 79). However, there were also some women who did not hesitate to add their voice into politics. One of them was Mercy Otis Warren, a great friend of Abigail Adams, “Who wrote not only satirical plays of the war, but also a three-volume history of the Revolution entitled *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*” (Engle, 1976, p. 149). There were also other women who wanted to express their opinion and to do more than put only their names on a petition. One of them was called Hannah Griffitts and she was a poet who wanted to urge Pennsylvania women to support the boycott, however, she published her work anonymously as anonymity not only allowed her to maintain her genteel reputation, but it also allowed her to openly criticize Pennsylvania men for failing to enforce the boycott themselves:

Since the men, from a party of fear of a frown
Are kept by a sugar – plum quietly down
Supinely asleep – and depriv’d of their sight
Are stripp’d of their freedom, and robb’d of their right,
If the sons, so degenerate! the blessings despise
Let the Daughters of Liberty nobly arise (Berkin, 2006, p. 16)

Anonymous verses continued to appear in colonial newspapers, many of them urging women to politicize their daily domestic life. What a woman bought when she went to a shop, what she ate, what she drank, and the clothing she chose to wear could all signal a political commitment as well as a personal choice. A popular verse advised women to:

First, the, throw aside your topknots of pride,
Wear none but your own country linen,
Of economy boast, let your pride be the most
To show clothes of your own make and spinning. (Berkin, 2006, p. 16)

Clothes of your own make and spinning, or homespun, quickly became a badge of honor and a visible political statement. With the boycott of British cloth, American women were forced to manufacture their own, another chore added to the already enormous domestic duties of the day. Even though women began to mobilize for the patriotic cause, they did so in a domestic atmosphere where criticism of women in politics would not be

nearly as likely. As they stayed within their domestic feminine sphere, they effectively avoided entering directly into the male sphere. “The Daughters of Liberty” in Boston, a parallel to “The Sons of Liberty”, illustrates this notion. According to Norton (1996), “These women met at the home of the Rev. Mr Morehead, where they amused themselves during the day by spinning. Sometimes as many as one hundred, but normally twenty to forty, all of them were dressed in homespun” (p. 167). The spinning bees were ideological showcase; they were intended to convince American women that they could render essential contributions to the struggle against Britain, and to encourage them to engage in increased cloth production in the privacy of their own homes.

Clearly these women carried vital symbolic meaning both to the participants and to the editors who reported their accomplishments. Stories about spinning bees were often printed in local newspapers as Norton (1996) gives a proof in her book:

The Boston Evening Post, which carried only one previous account of female domestic industry, printed twenty-eight articles on the subject between May and December 1769, and devoted most of its front page on May 29 to an enumeration of these examples of female patriotism. (p. 166)

The Daughters of Liberty organized up and down the colonies, with hundreds of women spinning their wheels and sipping “Liberty Tea”, a mixture of herbs and flowers rather than the real thing. And as Roberts (2005) states: “*The Boston Evening Post* published a boycott agreement on February 12, 1770; women from three hundred families, including ladies of the highest rank and influence, publicly promised totally to abstain from the use of tea” (p. 40). The entire community became slowly involved in the women’s activities. Spinning wheels were brought out and dusted off, and lessons in what had become a lost art were offered. Notices of spinning bees for those who remembered how to do it, and of spinning demonstrations for those who had never sat at a wheel, began to appear in local newspapers. Many of these events were hosted by local ministers.

Most of the women who participated were unmarried – daughters of prosperous families who were, as Norton (2006) has put it, “America’s first leisure class” (p. 18), yet some wives and mothers managed to attend, despite their household and child-care duties

These women were once even called a fighting army of amazons armed with spinning wheels and ready to do battle for colonial rights. Although, many of these women

might not have seen themselves as “Daughters of Liberty”, they might have viewed their actions in more traditional terms, for instance, as acts of charity for the poor, and the ailing, upon whom the boycott of English cloth fell as a special burden. Yet they could not prevent other colonists from interpreting their actions in more radical terms. “The women had, after all, transformed what was traditionally a solitary activity into a group effort” (Berkin, 1996, p. 18). On the contrary, there were also those who viewed these acts mistakenly and believed that the ministers had consciously inflamed these women into acts of rebellion. Undoubtedly, these women never left their domestic sphere that was set for them in Men’s world and they never jeopardized the women’s traditional role. Moreover, they used their gender to their advantage, relying on tried and true methods of femininity to pursue their political ideals.

Esther De Berdt Reed played an significant role during the Revolution as it was her idea to bring together women who shared the same goal which was to contribute to the Revolutionary War and show their different special feminine patriotism. Esther used her role as the wife of the governor of Pennsylvania to begin a popular woman’s organization. Even though she was born in England, she felt as a true American. As a wife of Joseph Reed, she entertained some of the members of the First Continental Congress, among them George Washington and John and Samuel Adams. According to Engle (1976), “On this occasion, a delegate from Connecticut remarked that Esther was a “Daughter of Liberty”, zealously affected in a good Cause” (p. 36). Not as other women who felt slightly uncomfortable discussing the war issues and politics, she acknowledged her feelings over the conflict and did not apologize for her views. She rather used her domestic role, as she did in entertaining the members of the Continental Congress, to further her own opinions and ideas about the Revolution.

During that time some of the women who were often engaged in organized support of the war effort, published their opinions concerning the revolutionary events. But the call for action created the article titled *The Sentiments of an American Woman* written by thirty-three-year-old Esther DeBerdt Reed:

Her idea that women should “wear clothing more simple, hair dressed less elegant,” and give the money saved to the troops as “the offering of the ladies” might have been suggested by Martha Washington, who was always worrying about bolstering troop morale. Whatever the origin, it was an idea

that immediately caught on. Women in Philadelphia set about finding ways to carry out the campaign within days of the publication of the “Sentiments”. (Roberts, 2004, p. 124)

Esther’s *Sentiments* claimed that “American women were determined to do more than offer “barren wishes” for the success of the army” (Norton, 1996, p. 178). Moreover, the article mentioned female heroines of the past and their patriotic activity. Mostly it was referring to female monarchs, Roman matrons, and Old Testament women. Mrs Reed especially held up Joan of Arc as an appropriate model, for she had driven from France the ancestors of these same British. Esther was a daring kind of person as she was not afraid to go far beyond the boundaries of the feminine sphere to interfere into the political sphere of men. There exist some doubts whether it was really Esther who wrote *Sentiments* as it was only signed “By an American Woman”. However, according to Hoeckle (2012), “the historians have created Esther DeBerth Reed as its author” (p. 1). Her appeal drew an immediate response. Three days after the publication of the broadside, thirty-six Philadelphia women met to decide how to implement its suggestions. The plan proposed the mobilization of the entire female population to make contributions in any amount and then the sum should be sent to Martha Washington to be used for the benefit of the troops. Newspapers around the country printed the documents, and women started organizing. “The Ladies’ Association of Philadelphia” elected Esther as their leader and kept records of exactly how the fund drive proceeded. Women set out in pairs, dividing up the city among them, and went door-to-door asking for donations.

Even Sarah Franklin Bache, Benjamin Franklin’s daughter, participated as a collector and her being part of “The Ladies’ Association of Philadelphia” supported the women’s spirit as it was somehow surprising that women of such social standing undertook the very unfeminine task of asking for contributions not only from friends and neighbours but also from strangers, poor people, and servants. However, not everyone was so pleased with the determined ladies. Cokie Roberts (2004) states in her book *Founding Mothers*: “Anna Rawle wrote to her mother that it was the fund-raisers’ insistence that caused women to cough up cash, people were obliged to give them something to get rid of them” (p. 126). Nevertheless, in spite of the negative posture of some women, the Ladies’ Association was highly successful as in just a few days the women collected about \$300,000. The women’s movement rapidly spread to other states. The first to copy the

Philadelphians' lead were the women of Trenton, New Jersey: "They even published *Sentiments of a Lady in New Jersey* in deliberate imitation of the Philadelphians" (Norton, 1996, p. 183). Even Martha Wayles Jefferson, whose husband, Thomas, was then the governor, received a copy of the Philadelphians' plan directly from Martha Washington. Since she was in poor health, Mrs Jefferson decided to encourage her friends to take part but did not assume an active role herself. Although the women's association found active participants only in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia, still it collected substantial sums of money. Unfortunately for Esther Reed, Martha Washington went home to Mount Vernon that July and so was not at camp to receive the money. So General Washington was in charge of determining how it would be spent, and he had never liked the women's avowed intention to provide "an extraordinary bounty" instead of the things the soldiers should receive from Congress or the states. As soon as he learned of the drive, Washington wrote to Esther's husband – not to her: "That the general would, nevertheless, recommend a provision of shirts in preference to anything else" (Roberts, 2004, p. 128).

Unfortunately Esther had no chance to finish the business, for she died the following month. The leadership of the association was assumed by Sarah Franklin Bache and she assigned the shirt-making for the soldiers to individual women. During that autumn the Bache household was filled with needlework, recently finished by the ladies of Philadelphia. There were 2,200 shirts, and "on each shirt was the name of the married or unmarried lady who made it" (Roberts, 2004, p. 130). Even while bowing to Washington's wishes, the women had found a way to make an individual mark. However, ironically and symbolically, the Philadelphia women of 1780, who had tried to chart an independent course for themselves and to establish an unprecedented nationwide female organization. They, however, "ended up as what one amused historian has termed General Washington's Sewing Circle" (Norton, 1996, p. 187).

Nevertheless, for Thomas Jefferson women were still more suitable to play their feminine role: "to soothe and calm the minds of their husbands returning ruffled from political debate" (Norton, 1996, p. 190). In addition to that the Ladies Association had not yet earned the respect of being a fully functional, politically-minded human beings instead, they had a long way ahead to persuade a hostile public that expressive political behaviour did not threaten the traditional domestic domain. Even for Abigail Adams, for whom political commentary was as natural as breathing, and it was also an endeavour for which

she showed remarkable talent. But Mrs Adams believed that a woman should express her political opinions only in private, rather than by taking part in public debates. On the other hand, she believed that there is a spirit that lives in the women of America and thanks to them, “America will not wear chains while her daughters are virtuous. She saw female Americans as equal participants in the war effort” (Norton, 1996, p. 189).

Women in post-revolutionary society

For eight years, American women and men had been caught up in extraordinary drama and crisis, surrounded by violence and death. By 1783 they longed for the comforting demands of ordinary life. Unfortunately, the world that many Americans remembered, and hoped to return to, was a mess. It seemed essential to pause and to consider the lessons the Revolution offered for women and to decide what changes in women’s roles might prove necessary in the new republican society. As Norton (1996) emphasized in her book *Liberty’s daughters*: “To Jefferson, the ideal feminine role was to soothe and calm the minds of their husbands returning ruffled from political debate” (p. 190). “The postwar debate on the woman question began with a resounding rejection of the traditional notion that women were both morally and mentally inferior to men” (Berkin, 2006, p. 151). Women who had competently managed the family estates during the Revolution despite severe hardships no longer accepted unquestioningly the standard belief in feminine weakness, delicacy, and incapacity. Undoubtedly, their daughters, who had watched their mothers cope independently with a variety of difficulties, felt no pressing compulsion to marry quickly, some even decided not to marry at all and others chose to limit the size of their families.

Some American parents in the postwar period allowed their offspring complete freedom of choice as to marital partners. Consequently, children began to expect the right to decide for themselves in marital matters if they so desired: “The requirements for a husband centered on their desire to be treated with respect, as an equal and as a partner” (Norton, 1996, p. 232). Surprisingly, there were still a lot of girls who continued to seek their parents’ and friends’ assessments of potential spouses. Of course, the traditional attitude towards marriage did not disappear overnight: “The magazines that printed articles calling for mutuality and reciprocity in matrimony also published essays advocating female subordination and male dominance in marital relationships” (Norton, 1996, p. 235). American families began to abandon their hierarchical character and marriage stopped to

be viewed as a contract between a superior and an inferior. Consequently, “some of the future brides refused to say the word “obey” in the marriage service” (Norton, 1996, p. 235). In short, there were significant changes in women’s rising expectations about marriage and their new willingness to assert themselves in the event of dissatisfaction and the public had no other choice but to accept it. Indicative of the new approach was the fact that marital advice was no longer directed almost solely at the wife. Instead, men were instructed to treat their wives as “reasonable creatures” (Norton, 1996, p. 235). In this atmosphere of questioning the old ways, women also started to dispute, in tentative fashion, perhaps the most basic assumption of all: the idea that marriage was every woman’s destiny. The Revolution brought significant changes into the people’s lives and women started to feel more confident to make the right decisions about their own lives. Even Rosemarie Zagarri (2007), a professor of history at George Mason University, states in her book *Revolutionary Backlash*:

Although the Revolution did not necessarily radicalize women, it did politicize them in ways and to an extent that had never before occurred. They started to see themselves – and were seen by others – as political beings...Before the Revolution, the notion of women’s subordination to men permeated American society. The doctrine of coverture assumed that women were not independent legal agents. (p. 26)

Before they were married, they were under the guardianship of their fathers. Once married, their husbands acted in their stead. Without a separate legal identity, women could not sue or be sued in court, make contracts, or own property. Their lives were defined with reference to home and family. Women were not supposed to travel alone, speak in public to audiences that included men, or become too learned. Their exclusion from political rights was an assumed given; seldom questioned or discussed. The most crucial development was the growing centrality of the principles of equality and natural rights. Originally, of course, these ideas were meant to pertain primarily, if not exclusively, to men.

Ironically, the most powerful argument, however, was that if all men were truly created equal and shared the same natural rights, then all men should be entitled to vote. Unfortunately, women who were almost always placed under the dependence or care of a

father, uncle or brother had no chance of being allowed to vote for themselves. In other words, they were placed in the same dependent category as children and the insane. There was simply no room in John Adams's masculine system for female legal or economic independence. Nor was there any room in his new republic for female political participation. However, after the Revolution women no longer regarded politics as falling outside their sphere.

As Abigail Adams put it in 1799, "If a woman does not hold the reigns of Government, I see no reason for her not judging how they are conducted" (Norton, 1996, p. 190). Mrs. Adams was perhaps the foremost female expert at those talks of judging government. John Adams's travels as a diplomat and his long career in public service, concluding with his presidency at the end of the century, necessarily brought his intelligent wife more directly into contact with the political world than any of her female contemporaries. Abigail, as her daughter Nabby once remarked, loved her "dish of politics", and from the beginning of John's involvement with the revolutionary cause she took an avid interest in public affairs. Only in one state did the post-revolutionary era bring a real, if temporary, recognition of women's potential public role. In May 1776, anticipating the coming of independence, the Continental Congress sent out instructions ordering each state to devise a new framework for governing. In 1790, New Jersey adopted an election law that explicitly referred to voters as "he or she". Actually, the New Jersey law applied only to a small proportion of the women in the state. "Because married women could not own property, and voting required ownership of a substantial amount of property, widows who had inherited their deceased husbands' estates were the women most likely to vote" (Zagarri, 2007, p. 31).

Due to the lack of documentary records, we do not know why New Jersey legislators were willing, when no other state was, to extend the vote to women. There is no indication that New Jersey women actively demanded the vote. They did not send petitions to the legislature, hold rallies, or mount campaigns on their own behalf. Nonetheless, among those who qualified, women could vote – and did vote – in both state and federal elections for a time. Thus from 1776 to 1807, New Jersey women of wealth claimed their right to vote in local elections: "Many people at the time believed that female voting degraded the political process, masculinized women, and undermined male authority" (Zagarri, 2007, p. 33). There may have been other reasons as well why women did not

object to the loss of the vote. It was understood that New Jersey had pioneered female suffrage by extending to women the principle of no taxation without representation. Despite the reversal, New Jersey had taken a profound step. Allowing women to vote had made the unimaginable a reality. Therefore, women could, for a short moment, behave politically in the same ways and on the same terms as men.

There were also written numerous pieces of poetry, fiction, humour, and prescriptive essays concerning “The Rights of Woman”. For example, several different periodicals published the same poem *Rights of Woman*, written by a “Young Lady” of Philadelphia:

God save each Female’s right,
Show to her ravish’d fight
Woman is Free,
Let Freedom’s voice prevail,
And draw aside the veil,
Supreme Effulgence hail,
Sweet Liberty.
Let Woman have a share,
Nor yield to slavish fear.
Her equal rights declare,
And well maintain (Zagarri, 2007, p. 41)

Acknowledging that women had natural rights opened up new possibilities. If women shared in the same constellation of God-given rights as men did, then women were what modern political theorists call “right bearers”. However, it was clear, women were not excluded because they lacked sufficient property, education, or virtue but simply because they were women. “Although now construed as a “natural right”, voting had essentially become a different kind of privilege – a privilege of those who had happened to be born male” (Zagarri, 2007, p. 153).

Prior to the Revolution, Americans had paid little attention to the formal education of women. If a girl knew the rudiments of learning, this was thought to be more than sufficient for her limited needs. In the new republic, by contrast, the importance of female education was repeatedly emphasized. In 1796, John Adams appropriately explained to his

daughter Nabby, then a matron of thirty: “You , my dear daughter, will be responsible for a great share of the duty and opportunity of educating a rising family” (Norton, 1996, p. 248). The Americans’ vision of the ideal woman – an independent thinker and patriot, a virtuous wife, competent household manager, and knowledgeable mother. These motives combined to lead to widespread changes in the education of white American girls during the postwar decades. Public education at the elementary level was opened to female as well as male children, and private academies founded in the 1780s and 1790s greatly expanded the curriculum previously offered to girls.

On the other hand, critics warned that formal education would create masculine women, unattractive in their appearance, negligent in their duties to husbands and family. Despite strong opposition from these critics, the campaign for female education was remarkably successful. In 1787, the doors of the Philadelphia Young Ladies Academy opened, ushering a revolution in education in the new nation. Similar academies and boarding schools sprang up in New England, the middle states, and the South. The course of study in most cases was the same as the course of study offered in boys’ preparatory academies and included history, rhetoric, geography, English composition, and mathematics.

This revolution in education was so successful that, by the end of the eighteenth century, elite society frowned upon a poorly educated young woman. A woman, should be able to write and converse elegantly and correctly, pronounce French, read history, comprehend some simple geography and astronomy. Clearly, times had changed and the criteria upon which women judged each other now encompassed the qualities of the mind as well as beauty and personality. The love of reading and habits of application became fashionable and fashion we know is the mistress of the world. Part of that new fashion was evident in women’s comments on the intellectual capacities of the other females they encountered.

Whereas they had once remarked solely upon the softness and delicacy of new acquaintances, they now began to assess their friends’ mental abilities: she “possesses a mind naturally strong, which is entirely improved an cultivated”, she is “well informed”, she has “excellent understanding, a cultivated mind and a lively imagination”. There existed also some critical views on female education; these critics advocated that women

should rather take care of their looks than of their education. Also Norton (1996) states in her book:

Politics, philosophy, mathematics would render you unwomanly indeed. They would damp that vivacity, and destroy that disengaged ease and softness, which are the very essence of your grace...Let your knowledge be feminine, as well as your person...To be lovely then you must be content to be women, to be mild, social and sentimental – and leave the masculine virtues, and the profound researches of study to the province of the other sex. (p. 264)

Abigail Adams wrote to her husband in 1778: “You need not be told how much female Education is neglected, nor how fashionable it has been to ridicule Female learning” (Kerber, 2001, p. 191). Nevertheless, since women were not being prepared for the traditional professions: law, medicine, and the clergy – teachers could not easily assume that girls ought to have the same studies as did boys. They were forced to confront the question what profession were girls being prepared for? It was believed that girls were being prepared to be wiser wives and better mothers. Domesticity was treated as a vocation, motherhood a profession. This decision transformed the notable housewife into the republican wife and mother, “Therefore, it stood to reason that if mothers were to be responsible for rearing patriotic sons and daughters, then society must arm them with the knowledge necessary to the task” (Berkin, 2006, p. 154). Mothers must know enough about government and politics, about past republican experiments and the causes of their failure, about science and its empirical mode of thinking, and about moral philosophy to socialize their children for citizenship in the new nation because it will be them, the republican mothers, who would nurture republican children. The new era also brought some new job opportunities for young women. As new ladies academies were being established all over the country, the young educated women were hired to share their knowledge and to teach in local primary schools.

The American male society developed two separate but intertwined arguments for supporting female education. Firstly, insisted that education would not “unsex” women but would instead make them better wives, mothers, and mistresses of households. Secondly, they stressed the “feminine” nature of the instruction proposed for girls by carefully

delineating the curriculum and emphasizing the cultivation of proper behaviour. Abigail Adams, too, found this argument persuasive:

“It is very certain, that a well-informed woman, conscious of her nature and dignity, is more capable of performing the relative duties of life, and of engaging and retaining the affections of a man of understanding, than one whose intellectual endowments rise not above the common level,” she declared in 1814. (Norton, 1996, p. 265)

For the first time, American daughters as well as sons were being told that they could “improve”. Moreover, men had to accept women as equals, and to afford them equal access to knowledge so that women could drink freely of the fountain of knowledge. Young women understood that they had the chance for a better education than that available to any previous generation of female Americans, and they were determined to take full advantage of their favoured position. Rarely, in the literature of the early Republic, do we find any objection to the notion that women belong in the home, we can, however, find the argument that the Revolution had enlarged the significance of what women did in the home, “The model republican woman was to be self-reliant, literate, untempted by the frivolities of fashion. She had a responsibility to the political scene, though was not active in it” (Kerber, 2001, p. 228). Anticipating the critics, the Young Ladies’ Academy promised not wholly to engross the mind of each pupil, but to allow her to prepare for the duties in life to which she may be destined. In other words, women were allowed to be educated but only for being the republican mothers to their children. As the terms of domesticity were changed, and the past could not have been taken back, the best men could do was to claim that properly educated republican women would stay in their homes and, shape the characters of their sons and husbands in the direction of benevolence, self-restraint, and responsible independence. It was believed that women should play a political role through the raising of a patriotic child. Apart from this, the Republican Mother was to encourage in her sons civic interest and participation, “She was to educate her children and guide them in the paths of morality and virtue. But she was not to tell her male relatives for whom to vote. She was a citizen but not really a constituent” (Kerber, 2001, p. 283). Women were obliged to observe the political world with a rational eye, and they were to guide their husbands and children in making their way through it. They were

to be teachers as well as mothers. Republican Motherhood was a very important, even revolutionary, invention. It altered the female domain in which most women had always lived out their lives, it justified women's absorption and participation in the civic culture. Those who shared the vision of the Republican Mother usually insisted upon better education, clearer recognition of women's economic contributions, and a strong political identification with the Republic.

In this sense, restricting women's politicization was one of a series of conservative choices that Americans made in the postwar years as they avoided the full implications of their own revolutionary radicalism. On the one hand, women invested much more power and responsibility but it confined them to their homes. They were allowed to go one step forward but they had to keep one foot back.

In order to do the best to keep some control over their lives, women had to accept that they indeed have more control over their destiny than their uneducated grandmothers had in 1750. They could, if they wished, teach at school for a few years before marriage, decide not to marry at all, choose husbands without consulting their parents, or raise their children in accordance with republican principles, "The war necessarily broke down the barrier which seemed to insulate women from the realm of politics, for they, no less than men, were caught up in the turmoil that enveloped the entire populace" (Norton, 1996, p. 297). Moreover, society had at last formally recognized women's work as valuable and domesticity was no longer denigrated, no longer was the feminine sphere subordinated to the masculine, nor were women regarded as inferior.

Norton (1996) perfectly describes the contrasts and significant changes in the "women's question":

In prerevolutionary world, no one had bothered to define domesticity: the private realm seemed unimportant, and besides, women could not escape their inevitable destiny. In the postrevolutionary world, the social significance of household and family was recognized, and simultaneously women began to be able to choose different ways of conducting their lives. (p.298)

The white women of nineteenth-century America could take pride in their sex in a way their female ancestors could not. American society was growing comprehension of

woman's importance within a sphere far wider than a private household or a marital relationship.

THE FIRST “FIRST LADIES” OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

As John Adams once said, “Behind every great man, there’s a great woman” (Roberts, p. 76). He was right, all the significant men of that period, called Founding Fathers, had a woman next to them, whom they could trust and rely on. The most significant females were probably Martha Washington and Abigail Adams. They were the wives of the nation prominent leaders, George Washington and John Adams. We should bring the ladies out of the shadows and allow them to take their rightful place in history as the secret weapon of the American Revolution.

Martha Washington

She was nothing like the tart-tongued and opinionated Abigail Adams, there is not much drama, romance, or adventure concerning her person, moreover, there was even a gossip that her only possible claim to fame is her marriage to George Washington. In reality she was forty-three when the war began, she was a mature woman who had managed through tough times. Over the opposition of his family, she had married into one of the richest fortunes in Virginia in 1750 when, at age twenty, she wedded Daniel Parke Custis. In the next six years, four children were born and one died. Then, in rapid succession, she lost both another child and her husband, leaving her a widow, with two tiny children.

During the 1760s, Martha Washington settled comfortably into her role as the wife of a leading Virginia planter, George Washington. Their last full year of peace was 1774. For the rest of her life, through the American Revolution and her husband’s two terms as president, she longed to recapture those peaceful days before George Washington stepped irrevocably onto the stage of American history. George Washington was expected to serve the public so when the tensions with Britain intensified, he was appointed general and commander in chief of the forces outside Boston. And as Leon (2013) indicates:

The coming of the American Revolution permanently changed the trajectory of Martha Washington’s life. When she married George Washington, she had no doubt anticipated a relatively quiet life as a wealthy planter’s wife. Once George Washington assumed command of the Continental Army, however, she too became a public person and an active participant in the fight for independence against Great Britain. (p. 1)

After Washington left Mount Vernon in 1775, he would not return again for over six years. Every year, during the long winter months when the fighting was at a standstill, the General asked Martha to join him at his winter encampment, “Unlike many husbands of the day, he never ordered his wife to do anything. He simply invited Martha “to come to me, altho’ I fear the Season is too far advanced.” (Brady, 2006, p. 100). Martha was pleased to go, however, before she would leave home, she had to be satisfied that she had all the hams and blankets, clothes and endless hanks of knitting wool, and the million and one other things she needed for an absence of months. It was an amazing experience for her when she realized: “That her husband had transcended his Virginia identity and become a truly American leader” (Brady, 2006, p. 102). He had become a patriotic icon to Americans badly in need of a national symbol to replace the king. To Martha’s bemusement, her image too began to be demanded as a symbol of the republican wife. However, her only concern was her husband’s comfort. She was at his side and on his side, sympathizing and supporting him through depression, failure, disloyalty, and anxiety about the future. The General regarded his wife’s presence as so essential to the cause that he sought reimbursement from Congress for her traveling expense. Patricia Brady (2006), a social and cultural historian who has published extensively on first ladies, highlights this need: “He considered that her trips were therefore necessary to the performance of his military duties and justified repayment. The total cost had been a bargain considering her importance to the American cause” (p. 145). As George Washington was essential to Americans, Martha Washington was absolutely indispensable to him. Before she could make the first trip, however, Martha had to undergo her own ordeal. She had to be inoculated for smallpox. The smallpox was one of the most deadly enemies soldiers faced during wartime. After successfully weathering the inoculation, Martha could then travel to the soldiers’ camp without fear of contracting the disease or transmitting it to others. George was a strong advocate of inoculation but he doubted Martha’s courage to go through the frightening procedure. How could he have been so blind? Martha would brave anything to be with him. She was a brave woman, she wasn’t fearless, but she was brave enough to do things anyway. Boats made her nervous, but she made several hundred ferry crossings in her comings and goings. Smallpox inoculation frightened her. A gob of pus from a smallpox victim was inserted into a cut on her arm, all might be well, or her body

might break out in a mass of pustules. Patricia Brady (2006) nicely describes the personality of Martha Washington in her book *Martha Washington*:

To be with her husband, she didn't hesitate for a moment to have the procedure. Despite the very real dangers of capture by the British during the Revolution, she stayed at Mount Vernon or joined her husband - no hiding in safety for her. Her strongest fears were for others – her husband and children, grand-children, nieces and nephews. (p. 235)

Moreover, it seems that Martha Washington was her husband's closest confidante, the person he could always trust and rely on. No one could argue that Martha had had a theoretical bent of mind or that she took the lead in her husband's evolving political views. She was an intelligent and concerned participant who moved along the path toward revolution and nationhood with him. She read newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, discussing all the news of the day at dinner and in their evenings together. To ignore Martha's role in the great man's life is to ignore the emotional components of his character. She was essential to his sense of well-being, the one person with whom he could let down his guard and be himself. She was forced to develop her inner person from an ordinary woman to an extraordinary one. However, she did not mind as she did it for her husband.

When George Washington chose Valley Forge as his winter encampment she joined him immediately. Mrs. Washington was cheered by the troops when she made her annual appearance. Not the least excited of them was George Washington, who fretted for days before her arrival. Valley Forge indelibly created the image of the nurturing commander's wife who did all she could to relieve the soldiers' needs. She became a mother figure matching Washington's patriarchal role – a pleasant, kind woman who visited the hospital and showed “motherly care” for the soldiers, sick and well.

Martha was far from being the only woman at camp. In the eighteenth century, women were a visible part of any part of army encampment. Some of these women were the wives of soldiers who simply trailed along, having nowhere else to go. Other women offered their services for pay, as cooks, washerwomen, nurses, prostitutes, or seamstresses. That winter hunger and deprivation troubled the soldiers, there were bloody footprints left in the snow by shoeless soldiers, an encampment ravaged by disease – that was Valley

Forge. Martha led the way in putting aside fancy work in favour of knitting, darning, and making shirts, the other ladies present, were quickly shamed into joining her. Dry woollen socks without holes were an infantryman's greatest joy. All those socks were knit by hand, there were no factories to produce them, and a long day's march in leaky boots produced prodigious holes in the men's socks, along with painful blisters. Such wounds easily became infected in the filth they lived in, and once gangrene set in, amputation had to follow. All winter long, Martha and her friends turned out endless pairs of socks for the soldiers. One witness to Martha's activities later wrote: "I never in my life knew a woman so busy from early morning until late at night as was Lady Washington, providing comforts for the sick soldiers" (Roberts, 2005, p. 94). Martha and George settled into what would become their routine for the remaining five years of a war. She continued to go home every summer to see to home and family, while he remained with the army. Every autumn Martha climbed into the carriage, journeying for many weary days to join George in whatever hellhole served as winter camp that year.

When Esther DeBerdt Reed decided that it was time for the women of America to act on behalf of their poorly supplied soldiers, Martha Washington naturally became part of the effort. She contributed money herself and wrote to Governor Thomas Jefferson's wife, another Martha, who announced a collection in the churches of mostly rural Virginia. Although the original plan was for Martha Washington to distribute the more than \$300,000 collected nationwide, she was far away at Mount Vernon, so George was a poor second choice.

Some critics argued whether George Washington really married Martha for love or for her money. However, when her lovable son from her first marriage died she was stunned and grieved deeply for him. Then George Washington did not want to leave his wife for Congress until he had taken care of her. It is easy to see how much was Martha dear and important to him. Sharon Leon (2013), a research assistant professor in the Department of History and Art History at George Mason University states in her article:

Perhaps the hardest aspect of Martha Washington's new patriotic role was the expectation that she would be willing to sacrifice the lives of her loved ones for the sake of the country. If independence was to be won, she, like thousands of women throughout the country, had to be willing to allow their husbands and sons to go off to war. For Martha, having already lost one

husband to death, this was no doubt an extremely difficult task. Nonetheless, she accepted the risks and embraced the patriotic cause. As it turned out, George Washington, as we know, came through the war unscathed. (p. 1)

Martha's only wish was to spend the remaining years with her husband and her grandchildren at Mount Vernon. The Revolutionary years of crowded accommodations and jolting coaches would be over soon, she hoped, and she and her "Old Man" could resume their peaceful life. George intended to become a private citizen once more and remain one for the rest of his life. Patricia Brady (2006) beautifully describes the connection between George and Martha: "George Washington was the indispensable man to the success of the American Revolution, and Martha Washington was the indispensable woman to him" (p. 144). She spent part of every year with him, no matter how awful the conditions in camp might be. Their mutual love, confidence, and support helped keep him going in the face of every disappointment, setback, and defeat. Brady (2006) confirms the importance Mrs. Washington played: "Martha was truly the secret weapon of the American Revolution" (p. 145).

Martha suffered a lot by the loss of all her children that when she had the opportunity to adopt her two youngest grandchildren, she was more than delighted. And they were truly adored and loved by their grandmother who devoted her life to them. Not that Martha lacked confidence in George's ability and integrity, but when she learned that her husband was being considered for the role of the president, she thought it was time for someone else to do his share. Her husband had given all the time out of their mutual lives that anyone could expect. On the other hand, she knew he was the right man for the job so when George had been elected the first president of the new nation, she was happy for him. George Washington was inaugurated first president of the United States on April 30, 1789, in New York City. Leon (2013) states:

However, Martha faced a new set of challenges that disrupted her peaceful domestic existence. If the War for Independence had thrown Martha into an unaccustomed role in the public spotlight, her husband's assumption of the highest office in the new federal government only increased the unwanted glare. (p. 1)

In mid-May 1789, after the inauguration, Martha, the two grandchildren and seven house slaves, set off for New York City, the temporary national capital for the new government. Almost as soon as she arrived, Martha was swept up in the new duties of her position. She was not only responsible for managing the presidential household but also for supervising the domestic affairs at Mount Vernon from a distance. Martha had discovered the tedium of constant public attention. Contrary to her usual habit at home, her hair had to be set and dressed every day by a visiting hairdresser, and she attended much more to her clothes, putting on white muslin for the summer. Patricia Brady (2006) states in her book: “Her role as the commander’s wife during the Revolution had been a walk in the park compared with that of First Lady” (p. 165).

Fortunately, Martha became close with the tartly outspoken vice president’s wife Abigail Adams who described her as easy and polite, plain in her dress. Abigail once said about Martha: “Her manners are modest and unassuming, dignified and feminine” (Brady, 2006, p. 166). The women had formed unbreakable bond during those years and loved spending time together. This friendship among the women helped smooth the working relationship between the men. Washington and Adams didn’t care for each other, but they became more tolerant and accustomed to each other’s personalities through the social activities they shared with their wives. Although Washington was sometimes criticized for stiff ceremoniousness, his lady was always praised for her easy friendliness. She softened and humanized her overpowering husband, allowing him to relax a bit and show something of the private family man. Contrary to everyone else’s opinion, Thomas Jefferson did not think very highly of Martha Washington, he though her: “A rather weak woman who admired her husband far too deeply” (Brady, 2006, p. 182). He did not recognize either Martha’s intelligence or the strength of her principles. She was undoubtedly relieved when George refused to serve a third term. In March 1797, the Washingtons set off again for Mount Vernon — once and for all.

Martha Washington had hoped for many years with her husband at Mount Vernon. This was not to be. On December 14, 1799, only two and one-half years after leaving the presidency, George Washington died quite suddenly, soon after contracting a virulent throat infection. And Sharon Leon (2013) states in her article:

Although the nation mourned, Martha was bereft. She had suffered so many losses over the course of her life — having outlived four children, numerous

relatives, and two husbands — she almost could not bear the pain. She closed up the second-floor bedroom that she had shared with George and moved to a room on the third floor, where she spent much of her day. (p. 1)

Following her husband's death, Martha was deluged with letters of condolence and requests for mementos. The expense of this barrage of mail grew so heavy that Congress arranged for Martha Washington to enjoy the privilege of mailing free, a right previously enjoyed only by government officials. However, one more sacrifice was wanted from her, a far greater demand was made on her public-spiritedness. For example, Patricia Brady (2006) in her book asserts: "Congress requested that Washington's body be removed from the family tomb to be interred in the new capital city, and she agreed" (p. 224). Shortly before her seventy-first birthday, she died of old age, weakened by her illness, at noon on May 22, surrounded by her grandchildren. Martha Washington was the worthy partner of the worthiest of men. George Washington had passed on the office of the presidency, setting the standard for the peaceful succession of American administrations in the years to come. But no future president could achieve his almost mythical status as the founding and first president. Nor could any future First Lady replace Martha Washington as the first First Lady, the woman who had stood at Washington's side, supporting him throughout the founding of the American nation. Her contributions to American history were made in support of his career. Her constant presence at winter camps allowed him to stay in the field throughout the American Revolution. As the nation's hostess, she resisted all attempts to make her into a queen, as he had refused to become a king. Pulled far from her natural orbit, Martha Washington brought unself-conscious dignity and charm to the new role of First Lady of a new nation.

Abigail Adams

Abigail Adams was an extraordinary first Second Lady of the United States, and the second First Lady of the United States. Abigail Adams lives in the American memory as the most illustrious woman of the founding era. For generations, Abigail Adam's words, in particular her famous "Remember the Ladies" letter of March 31, 1776:

I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And, 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 favorable

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. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation. (Adams, 2004, p. 148)

She has inspired by those words women seeking equity in the workplace and within their own families. On the other hand, the critics emphasized that the only place she ever dared to utter them was in confidential letters to her husband. For instance Roberts (2005) gives a good example of her posture on this matter: “She once told John, my pen is always freer than my tongue. I have written many things to you that I suppose I never could have talked” (p. 61). Abigail wrote more than two thousand surviving letters, and she devoted large portions of them to exploring her feelings. In addition, most of Abigail’s letters begin with the salutation “Dearest Friend”, which shows us that John was not only a husband to her but also her close friend and she has confidence in him. Holton (2004) emphasized that: “Their letters provided them not only amusement but an opportunity to express their respect for each other with and resiliency” (p. 104). Additionally, the sceptics are wrong as Abigail actually shared her views on women’s right with numerous correspondents, male and female, inside and outside her family. She became very close to another woman of letters, Marcy Otis Warren, and their friendship lasted for a very long time. For example Roberts (2005) gives a very good example of her influence: “Mary Otis Warren’s ideas about women’s right, particularly women’s education, clearly had an impact on Abigail’s own thinking” (p. 50).

Like most women of her time, Abigail only assumed new responsibilities, such as managing the farm, when absolutely necessary. Furthermore, Abigail’s primary role in life was not to serve as a political activist, but as a mother and wife. Nevertheless, while she supported female education and the moderation of power within a marriage, she did not support equality for women. Abigail Adams was an extraordinary woman, but she was neither revolutionary nor feminist in her political beliefs and social attitudes. “Abigail never demanded that women be allowed to enter politics – not even on the frequent occasions when she herself took to the political stage” (Holton, 2004, p. 93). However, compared with the typical woman of the same time period, she was indeed very advanced in her attitudes and ideas about women’s rights. Abigail’s successful farm management

was not an attempt to expand her role beyond the strict confines of the home but an act of necessity. She had no choice but to assume her new duties, when her husband John made his first trip to Philadelphia in 1774. This change in her lifestyle, however, did not change her domestic values. Nevertheless, her passion and an abiding interest in the status of women were not diminished: “She was intrigued by everything from men’s attitudes toward women to the allegedly innate differences between the two sexes” (Holton, 2010, p. 24). Abigail Adams is an unforgettable icon of American early history, she was one of the most independent and influential American women of her time. And yet as Woody Holton (2004), an Professor of History at the University of South Carolina, states in his book:

Abigail’s most famous utterance – her March 1776 “Remember the Ladies” letter to John – is also the best-known protofeminist statement of the American revolutionary era. And yet two years into her marriage, Abigail was feeling free. “I desire to be very thankful, that I can do as I please now!” (p. 39)

Abigail was often miserable during the long periods of her husband’s absence. She wrote to her husband frequently and described her feelings of “great anxiety” (Holton, 2010, p. 62) that she felt for her country and for her husband and for their family. In her letter from 5 July 1775, she wrote: “I have felt for my country and her sons. I have bled with them and for them” (Adams, 2004, p. 73).

Despite Abigail’s belief of family hierarchical system, she disobeyed her husband twice. Firstly, when she was advised to close the Boston office and remove all books and papers. Abigail, however, was of a different opinion and feared that her husband’s fears were overblown. Woody Holton (2004), a Professor of History at the University of South Carolina, asserts: “She knew he was feeling terrible about having left his family in a far more vulnerable position than himself, and she was sure he was exaggerating the danger” (p. 68). So Abigail defied John’s instruction: “You mention the removal of our Books & c. from Boston, she told him on October 16. I believe they are safe there and so there they remained” (Holton, 2004, p. 69). It is evident that long before she wrote her famous “Remember the Ladies” letter, she was asserting herself in a way she never had before. It was not revolutionary rhetoric that had bolstered her self-confidence, it was her belief that the great distance separating John from his household, farm, and law practice made him

less capable than she was of deciding how the three separate branches could be best run. Since Abigail and their four children were left in a war zone, she was often able to give John and her other correspondents moment-by-moment reports concerning the war. The second time when she showed a kind of independency from her husband was when she had been seeking an opportunity to have herself and her children inoculated. Even though, it was not her decision to be made, according to the hierarchical status, she decided that it is time to undergo this procedure. She had to decide herself as John was again away and there was a serious danger of catching the smallpox.

Five months after writing the “Remember the Ladies” letter, Abigail was ready to talk not only about how some husbands tyrannized over their wives but about the restraints that men in general placed on women. And the demands she put forward in 14 August 1776 were even more deeply rooted in the ideal of the American Revolution than those she had made the previously:

If you complain of neglect of education in sons what shall I say with regard to daughters, who every day experience the want of it? ... I most sincerely wish that some more liberal plan might be laid and executed for the benefit of the rising generation, and that our new constitution may be distinguished for encouraging learning and virtue. If we mean to have heroes, statesmen, and philosophers, we should have learned women. (Adams, 2004, p. 214)

As she expressed her views and ideas concerning the female education and it might have seemed that she had developed a kind of independency of her husband, after a few next sentences she apologized for her hasty words by writing: “Excuse me. My pen has run away with me” (Adams, 2004, p. 214). Abigail never got over the injustice of excluding girls from proper schools, and she advocated vociferously for women’s education throughout her life.

Abigail felt that the long years apart from her husband, who was serving country, was her sacrifice to her country. For example Roberts (2005) gives an example of this: “To this cause I have sacrificed much of my own personal happiness” (p. 102). When the Congress had appointed John Adams commissioner to France, Abigail felt a great sorrow. John was asked to join Benjamin Franklin in Paris and he was going to take a little ten-year-old John Quincy Adams along. A few day later Abigail received a sympathy note

from her friend Hannah Storer: “Examining my heart I can’t say that I should be willing to make such sacrifices as you have done. I hope that my patriotism will never be proved in the way that yours has.” (Roberts, 2005, p. 103).

When John Adams succeeded George Washington as president of the United States. He was in desperate need of his wife: “I never wanted your advice and assistance more in my life. Loose not a moments time in preparing to come on that you may take off from me every care of life but that of my public duty, assist me with your councils, and console me with you conversation” (Holton, 2010, p. 308). Abigail was eager for her husband to become the president, but she was not so sure about being the First lady. She was worried that she wouldn’t be able to keep her mouth shut. Therefore Abigail wrote: “I have been so used to a freedom of sentiment that I know not how to ... look at every word before I utter it, and to impose a silence upon myself, when I long to talk” (Roberts, 2005, p. 273). Nevertheless, despite her fears, she remained engaged in politics throughout her final years. She continued to read every word of the congressional debates printed in the *National Intelligencer*. She stated once: “I cannot wean myself from the subjects of politicks” (Holton, 2010, p. 356).

CONCLUSION

The Revolutionary War established a nation and confirmed American identity. Furthermore, it also emphasised the responsibility of each citizen to their new country and to their society. The citizens got a rare opportunity to protect their freedom and fight for equality.

In addition to this, the women who had been dreadfully neglected and underestimated played a very important role in the creation of the new nation. Firstly, they were forced to become involved in defending their homes because their husbands and fathers had gone to war and these women were left to take care of their households and made a living. Even Deborah Read Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's wife, had to wield her gun and protected the Franklin house against an angry mob convinced that her husband had sold out on the Stamp Act. Abigail Adams gave most of the precious years of her marriage with John Adams to the country, as he was mostly absent from home and it was her who had to make the tough decisions concerning their household and take care of their children. Yet she still managed to share her own opinions concerning the political situation with her husband and stayed loyal to the nation, even though she had to abandon her own happiness. Martha Washington shone as a great heroine, especially to George. Particularly during the dreadful winter at Valley Forge where she nursed the soldiers' wounds and sewed them clothes. It was also her, who set the precedent of the First Lady, she was the first First Lady and had to be the one to demonstrate the position.

The major purpose of this thesis was to uncover the important roles women played in creating a new nation. Through my intensive research of sources about the Revolutionary War, I have learnt about the incredible importance the women close to the Founding Fathers had. They played a crucial role in forming the nation and creating new standards. Furthermore, I began to appreciate the inner power those women possessed and shared with their husbands. If it not was for them, their husbands could not have fought at the battlefields, could not have become presidents and could not have left their households. Moreover, these women were the first ones who started the emancipation wave by doing exactly what we do nowadays. Although, during their time it was something that people were not used to and it seemed rather daring. I also realized that these women would be very pleased by nowadays society which warmly welcomes women to study, vote, own and live in accordance with their wishes. It is as all the wishes of those women during the War

of Independence have come true. They fought for the equal rights and we are allowed to feel freer and to be equal to our male counterparts, though, there still remains some steps that must be taken to finally achieve the goal. The thesis showed that women were needed during the Revolution and that their decision to take on the heavy burden of participation in the struggle was their own. It was a first real wave of emancipation that women created and it was worth of all the obstacles they had to face.

Finally, I came to the conclusion that there is nothing so unique about them. They faced great hardship with courage, pluck, prayerfulness, sadness, joy, energy, and humour as women have always done. They put one foot in front of the other in remarkable circumstances and they carried on. They were the ordinary women in extraordinary times.

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SUMMARY IN CZECH

Předmětem bakalářské práce je popis období americké revoluce, kdy se třináct kolonií v Severní Americe chtělo osvobodit od Británie.

Práce je rozdělena do tří kapitol. První kapitola je rozdělena do tří částí a popisuje život a postavení žen ve společnosti z předrevolučního období a porovnává s pozicí žen během revoluce. Kapitola se dále věnuje popsání rozvoje postavení žen v porevoluční společnosti. Druhá kapitola seznamuje čtenáře s prvními dámami Spojených Států Amerických a to s Marthou Washington a Abigail Adams. V kapitole jsou popsány jejich osobité příspěvky během Revoluce za vznik nového státu. Na závěr práce jsou pak shrnuty a hodnoceny jednotlivé dosažené poznatky.