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Political aspirations of Colonial women: The correspondence of Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams

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The Correspondence of Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams

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Dedication

Firstly, to my parents, Douglas and Valerie Viar, for their constant support which I would be useless without. Thank you for letting me follow my dreams and pursue goals I set for myself. Also to Brett, thank you for always making me laugh and being a great older brother to look up to. To my grandmother, Virginia, who has never complained about my infrequent calls but always welcomes me with open arms. I will always strive to follow in your footsteps of kindness. Angela Walthall, thank you for making sure I had fun and introducing me to amazing people here. Lastly, thanks to Jennifer Wells for being one amazing best friend. I am grateful that you have stuck around in my life and have supported me through everything.

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand how women could become politically active during the War for Independence. As I began researching women of the period, I grew aware of the connection between Abigail Smith Adams and Mercy Otis Warren through the letters they left behind which developed into the following work. Though both women were better educated than a majority of women of the time, their conversations give a unique window into viewing the world women lived in. Their letters especially highlight how they not only became invested in the cause of independence but also how they sought to express their thoughts equally among men. By delving into the letters of both women, collected by The Massachusetts Historical Society, it became clear that women also struggled to maintain their own social hierarchy in relationships through deference like men, suggesting that they adopted more than just masculine political interests. Their friendship, as seen through their letters, shows the investment and hopes women held with the War for Independence. Their struggle to agree on life after the war, and their inability to maintain their friendship because of political disagreements, suggests that women became equally invested in politics when given the chance.

Introduction:
Why We Study Women

The period surrounding the American Revolution created important political changes not only for male society but also for the possibility of involvement for women. Instead of being forced to stay at home and tend to their children, women became more aware and willing to participate in their community. Two women, Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams, especially pushed against the boundaries of their sex. Both women lived in Massachusetts through the War for Independence and both were uncommon in that they frequently wrote about politics in letters to friends, family, and each other. While they focused their energies towards improving their education, they did so by helping each other understand the political atmosphere surrounding the independence movement. To improve their political minds, both women voiced their opinion to their husbands, friends, and at times the broader public when few women dared to question society standards. The following chapters look at the friendship between Abigail Smith Adams and Mercy Otis Warren to argue that women went through their own evolution of republican values, roles of deference, and experienced a political revolution of their own during the independence movement.

Two historians, Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, have argued for revolutionary changes in male behavior during the War for Independence that can easily be applied to women as well. Bernard Bailyn, author of many works including *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,* was one of the first historians to popularize a republican thesis. Bailyn argues that the Revolutionary period reflected “the realization, the

comprehension and fulfillment, of the inheritance of liberty…"[1] Men expressed their new awareness through pamphlets which helped in "the effort to comprehend, to communicate, and to fulfill this destiny…"[2] As colonists read and talked about new political aspirations, a growing desire for independence from England pushed many into a new political state of mind. Bailyn argued that men desired to "purify a corrupt constitution and fight off the apparent growth of prerogative power."[3] Focusing their energy on changing the political atmosphere in the colonies, male leaders of communities grew radically apart from their English ancestors. Gordon Wood's *Radicalism of the American Revolution* similarly looks at the growing separation by arguing that a sense of deference to superiors disappeared as independence became a reality.[4] No longer willing to submit to upper class demands, colonial society increasingly adopted a sense of equality among them that separated their world from the English who desperately sought to keep control. Both Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams went through similar changes in their lives that are examined in the following chapters. By understanding how their lives reflected the same changes men went through it will be apparent that gender does not influence consciousness.

The historiography of women in the Revolutionary era expanded from the early 1980s. Since then, historians branched out to explore the ways in which women's roles were affected by events. One trend focuses on a growing political consciousness of women that historians connect to the War for Independence. After gaining a new sense of power within the home, women explored politics as a means to express their own

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[1] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 19.
[2] Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 20.
[3] Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 283.
[4] Gordon Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Book, 1993).

growing concerns over the changing social environment in the colonies. By looking at the ways in which historians have dealt with the perceived changes in women one can gain a broader sense of the process women went through to gain control over their lives during a pivotal period in the United States' history.

Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first women to address education and politics together, asserted her own views on the subject in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures On Political and Moral Subjects* reflects on American women's growing interests.[5] Although her work appeared after the War for Independence it heavily influenced the growing women's movement of the nineteenth century. Both men and women read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the Seneca Falls Convention used it as a spring board for arguing against restricting women's rights.[6] Offering more concrete evidence on the idea of equality between men and women, Wollstonecraft addressed her argument towards the lack of education for women as the main reason society deemed them incapable of contributing to society. Too much emphasis on marriage for a woman made it so nothing else seemed to matter in her life but all women, Wollstonecraft argued, held a desire to be involved with politics. Having a better education would show they were just as capable as men to participate in society publicly.

One of the most influential works for modern historians that delved into the political world of women is *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in*

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[5] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures On Political and Moral Subjects*, ed. by Charles W. Hagelman, Jr. (New York: Norton, 1967). For another take on the political realm of women from a North American colonists see: Judith Sargent Murray, *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray*, ed. by Sharon M. Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For another look at women focusing on education see: Catharine Macaulay, *Letters On Education: With Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (London: C. Dilly, 1790), http://solomon.bwl2.alexanderstreet.com/cgi-bin/asp/philo/bwl2/sourceidx.pl?sourceid=S7472 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[6] Eileen Hunt Botting and Christine Carey, "Wollstonecraft's Philosophical Impact on Nineteenth-Century American Women's Rights Advocates," *American Journal of Political Science,* 48 no. 4 (October 2004): 707.

Revolutionary America, written by Linda Kerber in 1980.[7] Kerber recognized the influence of Republican Motherhood, and argued that it allowed women to become serious political actors in their communities as coverture and other restrictions on women came to an end in the years following the War for Independence.[8] The essence of Kerber's argument revolved around the creation of Republican Motherhood which gave women a public identity that "merged the domestic domain of a pre-industrial woman with the new public ideology of individual responsibility and civic virtue."[9] Women defended their rights to a political voice because they believed their experiences during the war gave them equal understanding of events. Before Kerber, little attention focused on the activeness of women during the War for Independence. Along with her work and Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters,* a new direction for historians opened up to explore women's willingness and ability to understand politics and grasp educational topics previously deemed too complicated for their sex.[10]

Robert J. Dinkin's *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920,* examined the consistent, yet often overshadowed, role of women in politics.[11] Fighting against the idea that "women were not seen as having a legitimate place in the political community,"[12] Dinkin argued that wives used their domestic services to improve their patriot standing in local communities. As wives vocalized their

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[7] Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

[8] Republican Motherhood described by Kerber is the idea that women now held the power to be taken seriously in society because they were responsible for raising their sons to be patriotic citizens. In order to raise their children correctly, women argued that they needed the same education as men since their husbands would not teach their sons what they needed to know as adults.

[9] Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 269.

[10] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980).

[11] Robert J. Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920* (Westport: Greenwood, 1994).

[12] Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 10.

displeasure with the way England treated the colonies, male patriots noted that society as a whole increased their interest in the cause against Britain. Though men acknowledged the influence of women, "these women displayed more presence and had more impact… than they had been given credit for."[13] Even though women did not hold the education believed to be essential to have a political consciousness, Dinkin's work highlighted how everyday women voiced their opinions in society.

Instead of tackling all women, Rosemary Keller's *Pariotism and the Female Sex: Abigail Adams and the American Revolution* focused on one woman's activism.[14] Ultimately, Keller showed Abigail Adams "going as far as it was possible to go within the limits of the gender conventions of her time and struggling… to extend these gender conventions."[15] By researching the letters of Adams, Keller insisted that the close relationship between Abigail Adams and her husband John Adams, who played a major role in the Independence movement in Philadelphia, made it possible for her to become so radically different than most women of the period. While Keller's approach to the political growth of one woman is significantly different than other historians examined, her focus on Adams often excluded the experiences of others with different social or economic backgrounds. This approach also makes it difficult to know whether or not her participation in politics only reflected her husband's activity or her own desires. Keller's work does, however, give significant insight into the ways she dealt with politics. By understanding the way she comprehended events occurring during the War for

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[13] Dinkin, *Before Equal Suffrage*, 3.

[14] Rosemary Keller, *Patriotism and the Female Sex: Abigail Adams and the American Revolution* (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1994). For other biographies of political women see: Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1995); Alfred F. Young, *Masquerade: The Life and Times of Deborah Sampson, Continental Soldier* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004); Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams* (New York: Free Press, 2009).

[15] Keller, *Patriotism and the Female Sex*, xiii.

Independence historians can use her experiences and apply them as a way to further comprehend women's experiences as a whole.

One of the most recent works out about political women in Colonial America is Rosemarie Zagarri's *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*.[16] Looking at the ways women gained political power during the War for Independence until Andrew Jackson's presidency, Zagarri argued that women experienced some political growth but it did not dramatically change their lives. Zagarri's argument is similar to that of Dinkin's showing women actively taking part in politics by marching and hosting public events in their homes that supported one of the emerging parties. Ultimately, Zagarri saw the War for Independence as a small time frame in which women were able to enter politics. This window of opportunity shut on women, however, as they attempted to remain in a political atmosphere that grew tense and violent with new party politics.

The only historian to look in-depth into the relationship between Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams is Edith B. Gelles who wrote *Bonds of Friendship: The Correspondence of Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren* in 1996. Much of her article focused on the style, type, and content of their letters believing that "friendships develop because of compatibility, but also generally because of reciprocity, and clearly Abigail expected to gain from her relationship with the older and more sophisticated Mrs. Warren."[17] Though both women inspired each other, Gelles ultimately argued that Smith Adams "proved to be the more engaging stylist, whose corpus survives as original and

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[16] Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[17] Edith B. Gelles, "Bonds of Friendship: The Correspondence of Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 108, (1996): 47.

definitive of the Revolutionary experience of her generation."[18] The following chapters seek to understand the political motivations and inspiration these two women gave each other as the world around them changed. Rather than focus solely on their friendship, this thesis seeks to analyze how revolutionary ideology changed the friendship between Otis Warren and Smith Adams and why these two women, who created a lasting political bond leading up to the War for Independence, decided to end their correspondence.

In a society in which a majority did not care what women thought about politics, why did Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams take themselves so seriously? They knew that to the majority of men their opinions did not hold much weight but they promoted their thoughts and desires as equal to that of any man. By understanding where these two women came from and how politics shaped their lives it will become apparent that women were much more politically driven than previously thought. While both women supported each other in the years leading up to and during the War for Independence, they found themselves caught in the political war during the adoption process of the Constitution. Much like the relationship between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, these two women offer the feminine side of political life in early America. By understanding their political aspirations and friendship, Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams show what was important to women on both sides of the political argument. Their concerns for the future and interests in state rights and the Constitution show that politics in early America was not separated by genders and both men and women held equally important investments in the future.

[18] Gelles, "Bonds of Friendship," 71.

Chapter 1:
"Requesting a Correspondence…":
Female Friendship and Political Influence Before the War for Independence

On March 31, 1776, Abigail Smith Adams wrote to her husband, John Adams, who at the time resided in Philadelphia as a member of the Continental Congress. Addressing the oncoming declaration from the colonies of North America for independence from England, she wrote;

> …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. If perticuliar care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to forment a Rebelion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.[1]

While John Adams brushed aside his wife's comments as a joke at the time, her comments today help modern classrooms explore the political consciousness of women. What is not explained, however, is the process Abigail Smith Adams went through to become one of the most politically active women of her generation. Her marriage to John Adams no doubt inspired Abigail Smith Adams to expand her education beyond the typical female experience. Having a well educated husband who openly discussed politics with her made her feel at home with him more than most men in her life. Within this chapter, however, the initiation of her friendship with Mercy Otis Warren is examined. Their letters show their early thoughts on politics and highlights how some women became equally invested to ideas of independence as men.

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[1] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC01d244 (accessed April 10,2012). All quotes throughout the three chapters will be preserved in their original spelling.

Firstly, it is important to know the world these two women lived in to understand why their involvement is atypical. Since the beginning of English colonization, the most important role for women focused on taking care of the home and being obedient to their husbands. For a woman, marriage reflected the ultimate sign of success because it allowed them to contribute publicly to society in the only way they could: by bearing children to continue her husband's lineage. Although women did take precedence over their children and servants socially, they could not avoid doing a majority of the manual labor around the house, especially those who belonged to the middle and lower classes that could not afford slaves. Also, under the legal system of the colonies women lacked separate identities from the men in their lives. As young, unwed ladies, their fathers claimed complete control over their lives which passed directly to their husbands through marriage.[2] Living completely dependent upon their husbands, society deemed education for women unimportant because they never needed to deal with issues outside of the domestic realm.

For most women in the New England colonies, educational opportunities remained relatively the same across social structures. Based on Puritan beliefs, which remained the dominant religious tradition, women at a young age learned how to read the Bible. Writing, on the other hand, could only be taught to men. During the French and Indian, or Seven Years, War, however, writing became acceptable for women as a means to help their husbands keep track of the family business as fighting pulled men away from their homes.[3] Unable to contribute to the war effort, women gained new opportunities through their domestic roles. While war called off men unexpectedly, it

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[2] Merrill D. Smith, *Women's Roles in Seventeenth-Century America* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 2-27.

[3] Smith, *Women's Roles in Seventeenth-Century America*, 150-154.

became apparent that the lack of preparedness for women to take over farms and other businesses directly resulted in their lack of recording skills. Through its slow integration, reading and writing would become more common in the eighteenth century as men recognized the advantages to having their wives help keep track of business transactions. For women, being able to write allowed them to stay in contact with distant family and friends. From their increased interaction with those who lived outside their home, women began to glimpse at a larger world around them for the first time.

For women, the correlation between wealth and education began to decline as more families took advantage of giving their children a more balanced structure of learning. As economic interests from port towns like Boston, Massachusetts, seeped into rural towns, the growing dependency on debtor-creditor relationships expanded along with inflating prices that men and women dealt with on a daily basis. Men could no longer rely upon their skills alone to deal with the constantly changing prices of goods; their wives had to have the basic knowledge and skills to help families stay as economically independent as they could.[4] As Colonial American society grew and expanded its acceptance of women, a majority continued to be restricted to the home and expected to keep their opinions to themselves.

Despite gaining new opportunities for education, women of the colonies leading up to the War for Independence continued to be silenced by the practice of coverture. Under the law of coverture, women lost the ability to own anything because their claims to everything, including any possible inheritance from their families, went directly to their husbands. After 1740, it became increasingly common for widows to not even have

[4] Gloria L. Main, "An Inquiry into When and Why Women Learned to Write in Colonial New England," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (1991): 581-583.

a claim on their husband's estates as their son's claims on inheritance began to take more precedence over the well being and financial security of widows.[5] Along with the inability to own anything, men continued to expect women to be disinterested in politics. If husbands chose to tell their wives about politics it went with the understanding that they would never have an opinion on events taking place.[6] Though Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams were born in different generations, their worlds revolved around these same gender expectations and limitations.

Mercy Otis, born in 1728, came from a respected family with a father, Colonel James Otis, who favored equal education for his children with no regard to their gender. Colonel Otis served as a judge in Massachusetts and followed Whig political tendencies which influenced all of his children as they grew up.[7] This movement, beginning in England, established itself within colonial society in a variety of writings. The most famous Whig text, *Cato's Letters*, brought together popular Enlightenment thinking into one well-rounded argument. A key concept that Whig colonists observed dealt with the protection of natural rights; the power of an individual, ordained by God, to make their own decisions in life rather than relying on the government or ruling leader to make decisions for them. Whigs also held strong fears against the manipulation of the government over the people. In England, the Parliament in control increasingly became corrupted through bribery by the rich. In response to these fears, Whigs in North America

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[5] Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 27.

[6] Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 8-36.

[7] The term Whig reflects the tendencies of people in the colonies towards identification beyond Britain. Essentially they were less reliant on British control over the colonies and preferred to focus on individual rights of the people. For more see Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 4.

kept a close eye on the way British-run governments in the colonies ran. One final, and perhaps most essential, idea promoted by Whigs followed a "pride in the liberty-preserving constitution of Britain… everyone agreed on the moral qualities necessary to preserve a free government."[8] For Whigs, a government had to protect the rights of its people, in writing, in order to earn and keep their trust. For Otis Warren, these ideas helped formulate her political thoughts against the British.

As the third oldest child, Mercy Otis grew up under the tutelage of Reverend Jonathan Russell, who taught her writing. Unlike many girls her age, Mercy Otis also studied with her two older brothers, James and Joseph Otis, giving her a unique educational experience that allowed her to grow up without the normal gender restrictions that kept men and women in their own spheres. Over time one older brother, James Otis, took over her studies and the two became close friends and political allies.[9] Along with her unique education, Mercy Otis learned her appropriate household responsibilities as a woman and soon attracted the attention of James Warren. Undaunted by Mercy Otis' uncommon level of education, the two wed in 1754, allowing her to live comfortably and continue her studies.[10]

As Otis Warren[11] started married life, her brother, James Otis, became influential in the colonial government. Despite his paid position as a defender of the British government, James Otis abandoned his job in 1760 to take up a case against the newly

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[8] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 45-46.

[9] By 1739, James became a student at Harvard University and with every visit home he would bring books back for his sister to read like John Locke's *Two Treatises*. For more see Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution*, 14.

[10] Katharine Susan Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution: The Life of Mercy Otis Warren* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1958), 25-43.

[11] To distinguish her from her husband and family, Mercy Otis Warren will be referred to as Otis Warren for the remainder of these chapters. Similarly for the Adams family, to distinguish Abigail's actions from her husband, she will be referred to as Smith Adams.

established Writs of Assistance.[12] In his attack against the British, Otis used the phrase "taxation without representation is tyranny"[13] which would become a major slogan for the Revolutionary cause. At the same time the colonies struggled to deal with these troubles, both Otis Warren's brother and husband earned spots in the House of Representatives. Having a brother, a husband, and a father in the middle of government business helped Otis Warren stay informed of political issues most women were unaware of. While her brother recovered from a brutal attack in the countryside, Otis Warren became more vocal among them in her opinions on politics.[14] Perhaps Otis Warren desired to save her family's name surrounding her sister-in-law's allegiance to England.

Otis Warren's perception of herself reflected her brother's view on female public participation and may help explain why she became more vocal among her male acquaintances. In his pamphlet *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, James Otis argued that women held just as much of a right to voice their opinion on politics as men. "Are not women born as free as men?... If upon the abdication all were reduced to a state of nature, had not apple women and orange girls as good a right to give their respectable suffrages for a new king as the philosopher, courtier, petit maitre and politician?"[15] Otis attempted to bring to light a relationship between women and politics that most of colonial society shunned. Most colonists before the War for Independence

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[12] These Writs of Assistance became known by colonists as an invasion of privacy and civil rights. These rules allowed officers of the British government to enter the homes of any colonist to search for smuggled goods. This expansion of power later influenced the creation of the fourth Amendment in the Bill of Rights protecting citizens against general search warrants without reason.

[13] Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 54.

[14] Many at the time were beginning to question James Otis' loyalty to the colonies because his wife, Ruth Cunningham, was loyal to the British cause. His attack reflected his growing influence over Massachusetts and his inability to quiet his wife who frequently spoke out against the patriot cause; Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 62-78.

[15] James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (Boston: Printed and sold by Edes and Gill, 1764), 4-6, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY100922840&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

preferred to ignore the possibility that women could process politics by portraying female attributes as the antithesis of republican virtue.[16] Her brother's acknowledgement of women's political abilities gave her encouragement and personal justification to start contributing to the male dominated patriot cause in her own way through play writing.

While she devoted a lot of time to her education, it is important to note that Otis Warren recognized her duties as a wife as an important part of her life. Otis Warren bore five sons within twelve years. Unlike most families, however, Otis Warren waited three years before getting pregnant suggesting that she, rather than her husband, controlled her reproductive cycles. Otis Warren's life was unique to have not only a family that supported her intellectual pursuits, but also a husband who allowed his wife to control, to a certain extent, her own domestic life. Unburdened by large amounts of children, Otis Warren pursued intellectual interests along with raising her family.

Born to a parson in Weymouth, Massachusetts in 1744, Abigail Smith Adams spent her early life helping her mother tend to widowed women and children left behind by the French and Indian, or Seven Years, War. This conflict grew out of contention over the Ohio Valley between France and Britain. When France began exploring the area, England immediately put all of its efforts into expanding its own control over North American land. From England's interest came a growing need for more troops in the colonies so they paid any colonists who would sign up, with no concern for their amount of training, and put them to work fighting.[17] As a child, Abigail Smith dealt with the real repercussions of war and how women struggled to handle their losses. Unlike Otis

[16] Republican virtue surrounded itself in ideas that dealt with strength, heterosexuality, loyalty, frugality, and honor. Women and femininity were seen as the corrupting influence over these traits and so men kept them away from politics to protect the image of society; Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 30-32.

[17] Kathleen Burk, *Old World, New World* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), 99-100.

Warren, Smith did not grow up in a rich family and dealt more with the issues affecting most people at the time.[18] Life did not appear in written documents but real and violent confrontations between men. Smith and her family witnessed fighting near their community and helped those struggling with losses after battles destroyed homes, farms, and marriages. Rather than be taught alongside her brothers like Mercy Otis Warren, Smith gathered much of her early education through observations and experiences.

Because her family focused more on helping others during her early life, Smith lacked the formal educational opportunities open to Otis Warren. Instead of having the privilege of being tutored, Smith's education took place under her mother's supervision and focused on the domestic duties that society expected women to know including sewing, washing clothes, cooking, and childrearing.[19] While Otis Warren learned the same domestic duties, they did not make up the foundation for learning that Smith focused on. Like many women among the colonies, Smith's education rested heavily on the strength of her mother's ability to pass down information. Although writing did not play a major part in Smith's education, her reading skills did go beyond the normal levels of literacy for women at the time. Unlike many women however, Smith perused a broad array of reading material from her father's library including a local newspaper, the *Spectator*. This collection enabled her to keep up with events beyond her home along with reading material that included Shakespeare, English classics, and some French.[20] Smith's early education largely came from her domestic education like many women in

[18] Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 4-5.
[19] Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 1-5.
[20] Edith B. Gelles, *First Thoughts: Life and Letters of Abigail Adams* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 19-20.

New England. Her father's collection, however, did give her a chance to explore new ideas and thoughts which influenced her to desire more knowledge.

The community Abigail Smith grew up in also gave her ample opportunities to experience education not normally part of a typical female experience. Because her father was a parson, an educated position in colonial society, he often invited friends and family to his home to share ideas and information among each other. Smith's own sister, Mary, recalled being "so totally secluded as we were in childhood from the world, we came to be so interested in the politics of it at so early a period of life."[21] The girls listened to the conversations adults had in their home which created a desire in them to read as much as they could on the foreign and domestic events occurring all around them in the 1750s and 1760s.[22]

The opportunity to use their father's library gave the Smith girls the desire for a better education and knowledge of the world. Mary Smith's recollection of staying up late to listen to her parents talk about politics shows that the Smith girls held a desire to know more about the world around them. In an attempt to improve herself, Abigail Smith frequently wrote to her friends and family requesting help and guidance in furthering her studies. In 1763, Smith sent a translation of French to a friend for corrections arguing that, "I am sensible that I am but ill qualified for such an undertaking, it being a maxim with me that no one can translate an author well, who cannot write like the original."[23] Despite her acknowledgment of an inferior education, Smith never let it hold her back

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[21] Paul C. Nagel, *The Adams Women: Abigail and Louisa Adams, Their Sisters and Daughters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11.

[22] Nagel, *The Adams Women*, 11-12.

[23] L.H. Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers: Adams Family Correspondence* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963-),1:4.

when expressing her views and sought out those who could expand and improve her intellectual pursuits.

Abigail Smith's first ally outside of her family in continuing her education proved to be her own husband, John Adams, whose extensive personal library expanded her interests to history, science, and politics. Married in 1764, she focused much of her time as a newlywed on raising children. More so than Otis Warren, Abigail Smith Adams saw her role as a mother to be more important than her personal desire for education and self improvement. Smith Adams also sought to fix her lack of education through her own six children by making sure that both her sons and daughters held ample opportunity to learn a variety of subjects including Latin, French, history, and mathematics.[24]

By 1770, she and her husband found themselves closely tied to politically charged events that drastically changed colonial and British attitudes towards one another. As a lawyer, John Adams became the defense attorney for the British soldiers blamed for the Boston Massacre.[25] Despite fears of losing business by supporting the British, Adams saw his part in this case as "one of the most gallant, generous, manly and disinterested Actions of my whole Life, and one of the best Pieces of Service I ever rendered my Country."[26] Adams, who Smith Adams supported in taking the case, defended the British soldiers because they both saw an unjust trial bent on making a statement against England rather than the pursuit of justice.[27]

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[24] Gelles, *First Thoughts*, 20.

[25] The massacre, so called by Paul Revere, became a hot topic among Bostonians. Surrounded by disputes of whose fault it was, the massacre began as colonists taunted and pelted British soldiers with rocks and snowballs. As tensions rose when the crowd grew, a shot from the British into the crowd created panic and mass hysteria killing at least seven people; Laura E. Richards, *Abigail Adams and Her Times* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1917), 53.

[26] L.H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 2: 79.

[27] John Patrick Diggins, *John Adams* (New York: Times Books, 2003), 26.

Of all the pre-war events, the Boston Massacre is arguably the most important of Abigail Smith Adams' early political life because it created a political relationship between her and her husband. Rather than reading about the events in newspapers or hearing about it through friends, the events leading up to and after the Boston Massacre played out right in front of her eyes and her husband's close involvement gave her a taste of the life Mercy Otis Warren grew up with. The Boston Massacre, more than anything else, highlighted the growing tensions between colonists and the English soldiers who struggled to make ends meet living in a foreign town. Tension rose to unbearable heights when colonists began taunting a group of soldiers. In response to their jeers, more soldiers showed up and prompted even more harassment until someone yelled "fire" among the chaos causing the soldiers to shoot into the crowd, killing five people.[28] The Adams' believed the presence of British troops in New England was unnecessary and a threat to colonist's control over their lives. Despite this, they saw the case as a chance to make a positive change in the relations between the colonies and Britain.[29] By showing the goodwill of Massachusetts to forgive, they hoped that the British would in turn leave and allow colonists to retake control over the local government.

The controversy surrounding the case and negative criticisms that targeted John Adams would have been impossible for Smith Adams to ignore but unfortunately there is nothing left in her records on the Boston Massacre. As a wife, Smith Adams could not help but be drawn into the world her husband inhabited outside of the domestic sphere. Watching first hand the conflict arising between colonists and British soldiers must have made her hypersensitive to issues concerning the changing dynamic in Boston. Smith

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[28] Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 44.

[29] Rosemary Keller, *Patriotism and the Female Sex: Abigail Adams and the American Revolution* (Brooklyn: Carlson Pub., 1994), 50.

Adams also took a heavier interest in politics as her husband became more prominent in Massachusetts. As wives served their husbands, Smith Adams perhaps saw her service being fulfilled by helping him make decisions over his career that affected their family. As Abigail Smith Adams began to make a more conscientious effort to be informed of events in the colonies, her life would change when she met Mercy Otis Warren.

For women in North America, eighteenth century life held some improvement in personal freedom. As population rates expanded, women found it easier to remain single rather than get married. Though they could not own much property and normally lived with their parents or immediate family, the possibility for women not to get married meant that gender restrictions were no longer as tight as they once were. No longer tied to the same fate, women now held more power of choice in the direction of their lives. As single women, however, they still could not have jobs outside of the domestic sphere like doctors or lawyers.[30] While progress in gender equality was small it does suggest that society slowly began to recognize the potential women held to support themselves.

Even though Smith Adams and Otis Warren were of different generations, their paths were almost destined to cross because of their husbands. Both John Adams and James Warren actively participated in Massachusetts political society. They frequently met and wrote to each other about politics. One of their earliest correspondences dealt with the Boston Tea Party which Adams declared it to be "the grandest, Event, which has ever yet happened Since, the Controversy [the Boston Massacre], with Britain, opened!"[31] Like Adams, Warren believed in the cause of the colonists and responded

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[30] Merrill D. Smith, *Women's Roles in Eighteenth-Century America*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2010), xv-xvii.

[31] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=PJA02d001 (accessed April 10, 2012).

back on the issue, "the People should strike some Bold stroke and Try the Issue. They have long enough Submitted to Oppressions and Insults following one another in A rapid Succession without finding any Advantage."[32] Before independence became widely accepted in the colonies, the Warren family opened their home to a variety of early patriots, including John and his cousin Samuel Adams. As these men established the growing desire for change in the colonies, Otis Warren met and befriended her husband's closest political allies. In a letter written to his wife from Plymouth, John Adams wrote; "in Coll. Warren and his Lady I find Friends, Mr. Angier is very good, but farther than these, I have very little Pleasure in Conversation."[33] John trusted the Warrens and enjoyed spending time with them above others. To his wife, the simple action of making a comment of preference for one couple over others made it clear to her that she needed to make an effort to get to know them better.

The start of Smith Adams and Otis Warren's relationship is not much different from the typical approach men took when forming friendships. According to Gordon Wood, the idea of deference in relationships "was not a mere habit of mind; it had real economic and social force behind it."[34] For men, they desired to establish relationships with other men who held more power than they did. The idea of friendship often referred to both personal and economic needs, creating a large network of friends gave individuals a greater chance at promoting themselves in rank within society. Even those who were ranked higher in the social hierarchy often found themselves bound to the support of

[32] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=PJA02d003 (accessed April 10, 2012).
[33] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:83.
[34] Gordon Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Book, 1993), 63.

lower ranked friends.[35] This approach to friendship is exactly what drew Smith Adams to Otis Warren and eventually caused Otis Warren to grow dependent on Smith Adams. As further chapters will explore, both women saw the potential in the other for information and connections to others who held power.

By the time Abigail Smith Adams wrote her first letter to Mercy Otis Warren on July 16, 1773, they already met each other once at the Warren household in Plymouth. Though both women lived in Massachusetts, the distance between their homes proved too much for either to travel away from their families frequently. Smith Adams and Otis Warren's duties to their home, husbands, and children took up too much of their time to allow for much else but their letters leave behind details of an intimate friendship that helped propel each other into thinking, writing, and understanding politics when most women stuck to their daily duties in the home. Though they accepted their positions in the domestic sphere, neither willingly gave in to complete control of the gender system. Smith Adams and Otis Warren consciously broke away from their domestic duties to explore other interests and made time to entertain new political thoughts together despite society's expectations of them to stick to household duties.

In her first letter, Abigail Smith Adams addressed Mercy Otis Warren as one would a respected elder. Smith Adams followed the typical trend in colonial society of requesting a correspondence to "stretch my pinions… and improvement I promise myself from this correspondence tho I suffer by the comparison."[36] To create a bond with Otis Warren, Smith Adams focused her initial letter on their children and a set of letters by Juliana Seymour from London entitled *On the Management and Education of Children*.

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[35] Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 57-59.
[36] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:84.

Although Smith Adams wrote with a pleasing, jovial tone in her first letter, Otis Warren held back much of her exuberance.[37] By 1773, both women had produced their own children but Otis Warren already had two sons nearly full grown. Perhaps because of her advanced age over Smith Adams, Otis Warren felt talking about another woman's opinion on raising children to be an unnecessary conversation to have since she already accomplished her routine.

As addressed by Gordon Wood, the idea of mentorship was quite common to broaden one's awareness of events occurring abroad and in North America. Smith Adams knew that Otis Warren held connections, even if they were through her husband, to political leaders of Massachusetts and therefore knew more about the events going on than most of society. Using her husband's established friendship with the Warren's, Smith Adams used typical social practices to her advantage to gain friends and mentors to promote her own improvement.[38] Beyond her personal goals of connecting with her husband's friends, Abigail Smith Adams greatly admired Mercy Otis Warren for her writing skills. By 1773, around the same time they began writing letters to one another, Otis Warren anonymously published poetry and plays. Much of her work appeared in the local newspaper, *Massachusetts Spy*, but she refused to publish plays under her own name because of society's lingering expectations for women to live within their gender spheres.[39]

The *Massachusetts Spy* itself is an important source to understand how prominent Otis Warren's work would have been in colonial society. Begun in 1770 by Isaiah Thomas, the newspaper was the first of its kind to be published multiple times per week

[37] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:86-87.
[38] Gelles, *First Thoughts*, 35-38.
[39] Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 7-8.

in Boston. In Thomas' memoir the purpose of the newspaper focused on meeting "the wants of mechanics and other classes of people who had each day but little time to read, and to whom the news and instruction of the paper would be convenient."[40] Though this newspaper started in Boston, it quickly spread throughout the colonies and became part of the political conversations occurring across the east coast. The *Massachusetts Spy*'s editorials often drew the attention of British officials who pressured Thomas to put articles defending their choices, like the Coercive Acts, in the paper. Refusing to follow British orders, Thomas' newspaper became a symbol of Whig ideology.[41] While it is impossible to say how many people actually read and talked about the work Otis Warren wrote, it is important to recognize the fact that her ideas could even be published in such a prominent paper. Though she kept her identity a secret to the public, editors accepted what a woman wrote as a serious, and important, propaganda piece that could help their cause for independence from England. Otis Warren's ideas aligned with major male leaders of society despite her being a part of the fairer sex. Having her work published in the *Massachusetts* Spy helped encourage new supporters in the years leading up to the Revolution.

Otis Warren published her plays anonymously to avoid repercussions of cynicism and doubt her community would unleash upon her and her family. Typically plays in Colonial America entertained general audiences but between 1772 and 1782 they became the leading way to turn reality into propaganda and Otis Warren is believed to be the first woman to venture into this art in North America. None of Otis Warren's publications, as

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[40] Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America: with a Biography of Printers* (New York: Published under the supervision of a special committee of the American Antiquarian Society, 1964), 1: xlii, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY3806282852&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[41] Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, 1:xlii-xlv.

far as it is known, were ever performed live. It is also unknown how colonists and loyalists responded to her work. [42] Though it may not be reflective of the majority of women's thoughts during this time, it is important to understand how Otis Warren saw society so her relationship with Smith Adams can be better understood.

Warren's first play, *The Adulateur*, served as her response against Massachusetts' Governor Thomas Hutchinson and his loyalist allies.[43] Opening her play with a discussion among patriots in the fictional land of Servia, her main character Brutus is portrayed as the leader trying to rally his men to continue fighting against Servia's controlling Governor Rapatio:

> Whatever right I've lost! I've still a dagger,
> And have a hand to wield it—'tis true it shakes—
> With age it shakes: Yet in the cause of freedom,
> It catches vigor. You shall find it strike
> The tyrant from his Throne.[44]

Warren's patriot characters, Brutus, Junius, Cassius, Portius, and Marcus are bonded together with the desire for freedom from Rapatio, Governor Thomas Hutchinson's likeness, and are willing to die for their cause before living under the extension of his rule over Servia.[45] Perhaps as a reference towards the debates over the Writs of Assistance, Warren portrays the patriots as men who want a say over their lives rather than be controlled by a leader who ignores his people's rights. Otis Warren also promotes

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[42] Jason Shaffer, "Making 'An Excellent Die': Death, Mourning, and Patriotism in the Propaganda Plays of the American Revolution." *Early American Literature* 41, no. 1 (2006): 3-4.

[43] Thomas Hutchinson is considered by Otis Warren to be one of the worst men in the world because he continuously sought to limit the power of the colonists in their own community. For more see Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution*, 45-47.

[44] Mercy Otis Warren, *The Adulateur* (Alexandria: Chadwyck-Healey Inc., 1996), http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_ap/uvaGenText/tei/chap_AM0079.xml (accessed April 10, 2012).

[45] As a side note, Otis Warren's patriot characters are similar to those of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* play highlighting her broad education as well as her strength in association to ideas that may have been popular at the time. For Shakespeare's play, Brutus and his allies murdered Julius Caesar because he kept grabbing too much power on the throne of Rome much like Rapatio in Servia making her idea of power's corrupting influence stronger by basing it on past historical events.

republican virtue in her play by keying in on their sense of individuality and power over their own lives. Despite losing legal rights, these men were willing to take a stand and fight for what they believed in.[46]

Otis Warren depicted Rapatio out for personal revenge against the patriots who destroyed his home.

> Think on that gloomy night, when, as you phras'd it,
> Indignant justice rear'd her awful front,
> And frown'd me from her—when ten thousand monsters,
> Wretches who only claim'd mere outward form,
> To give a sanction to humanity
> Broke my retirement—rush'd into my chamber,
> And rifled all my secrets—then slung me helpless,
> Naked and destitute, to *beg* protection.[47]

In reality, Hutchinson's home had been raided by the lower classes of Massachusetts reflecting the people's growing disgust with the man who justified poverty as a means to influence productivity. As colonists saw his position and wealth rise while theirs worsened economically, the people of Massachusetts took action into their own hands and used violence as their way of expressing discontent to a man devoted to ignoring their struggle.[48]

While Rapatio served as a nod to reality in her play, it is not too bold to see her patriots reflecting real individuals as well. Historian Katharine Anthony argued Otis Warrens' Brutus and Cassius were images of her brother James Otis and Samuel

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[46] For more on republican values see Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 95-108.

[47] Warren, *The Adulateur*, http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_ap/uvaGenText/tei/chap_AM0079.xml (accessed April 10, 2012).

[48] Ray Raphael, *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2001), 16.

Adams.[49] Brutus is Otis Warren's easiest character to identify because in the second act he fought Rapatio loyalists in the streets much like James Otis did in response to his wife's loyalist inclinations. Brutus is also considered the leader of the patriots, much like James Otis' early denouncement of taxation that inspired some colonial movement against the British crown. Samuel Adams' Cassius served as the moral backbone in the fight for liberty. Constantly pushing for men to work against Rapatio, Cassius' eagerness to fight for the cause of independence is noteworthy to Samuel Adams' own passion for a break from British control before the idea became popular.

The Adulateur looked at the injustices done to ordinary Servian citizens by Rapatio and justified the patriot's desire for revenge upon a cruel ruler. Reflective of Bernard Bailyn's classical republicanism, Otis Warren knew that her portrayal of events would immediately grab the attention of educated males because she was similarly raised. Otis Warren knew that the patriots of the early 1770s were the underdogs of the colonies and tried to make their cause more acceptable through her work like many other playwrights of the period. Showing Brutus and his followers as victims of intolerable treatment, Otis Warren likens fictional patriot issues to the Writs of Assistance, the Sugar Act, and the Stamp Act which affected a majority of the colonists, especially in Massachusetts, who read her play and made the patriot position more relatable to others struggling under the British governments control.

Despite her anonymity, close friends like the Adams family knew who wrote these pieces of literature. Inspired by Otis Warren's commentary of Massachusetts, Smith Adams continued to develop her opinion of events like the Boston Massacre and the continuing Tea Act that aggravated the people of Boston. After establishing the essential

[49] Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, 84.

groundwork for communication, Smith Adams sent Otis Warren a letter on December 5, 1773, just a few days before the Boston Tea Party, commenting on *The Adulateur* as well as the growing tensions in Boston towards the British enforcement of tea taxes. Acknowledging the arrival of tea in Boston, Smith Adams set up the situation in a surprising stylistic tone, "to you, who have so thoroughly look'd thro the Deeds of Men, and Develloped the Dark designs of a Rapatio['s] Soul, No action however base of sordid, no measure however Cruel and Villanous, will be matter of any Surprize."[50] Smith Adams looks upon the Tea Act in similar ways that Otis Warren portrayed British control through her play. Smith Adams depicted men like Hutchinson abusing their power over the colonists because they could. Smith Adams also recounted the building tensions among Bostonians, like Otis Warren's Brutus and Cassius, as "United, Spirited and firm"[51] against the imported tea and forced tax. Though their correspondence just began, it is apparent that Smith Adams took to Otis Warren and her ideas. Mimicking her style of writing played into the idea of deference that Gordon Wood promoted; Smith Adams sought to be like Otis Warren initially and adopted a similar style to show her desire to be better friends.

Adopting the same attitude as Otis Warren in *The Adulateur*, Smith Adams' letter revealed that she was particularly anxious that serious action would be taken by the colonists against the Tea Act. Sensing desperation among her fellow Bostonians, Smith Adams warned Otis Warren that, "very Many of our Heroes will spend their lives in the cause."[52] Despite not sharing many letters beforehand with Otis Warren, it is clear that Smith Adams took the actions of the British very seriously. From the Boston Massacre,

[50] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:88.
[51] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:88.
[52] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:88.

she knew hoe easily tension could lead to violence. In her response dated January 19, 1774, Otis Warren agreed on the need for hope that the friendship between the two peoples coul be "reestablished on so Firm a Basis that it will not be in the power of the Venal and narrow hearted on Either side of the Atlantick again to break down its Barriers and threaten its total Dessolution."[53] Although this response at first seems like Otis Warren regretted the outbreak of violence, she also believed that it now became England's duty to make positive changes before more drastic measures became necessary. As suggested in *The Adulateur*, Otis Warren wanted the corrupt government in Boston laid out by the British to be changed completely. She saw the replacement of corrupt leaders as the only way to make real progress and improvement in the relations between the British and colonists. If England would not take charge, Otis Warren believed it went to the colonists to make the changes they desired.

Smith Adams, for her part, reflected more on the Boston Tea Party than Otis Warren in their correspondence and took the actions of patriots to heart since it lacked the violence that she feared would inevitably come.[54] Her life up to this point revolved around the expectation that disagreements between two powers meant serious losses for both sides. Although Otis Warren did not assume war to be inevitable, she knew that it would take more than the dumping of tea into the Boston Harbor to make it clear to Britain that change needed to be made. Smith Adams, on the other hand, needed more convincing from her own experiences with war before it became clear to her that fighting should be an answer to rising tensions. By this point in their political interests, even before political parties existed, it is evident that Smith Adams prescribed to a more

[53] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:91.
[54] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:97.

conservative, cautious route than her liberal friend Otis Warren. Though they agreed that British forces had to be removed from the colonies, both women took different approaches to how they would prefer events to play out.

John Adams' participation in the Continental Congress beginning in 1774 gave him and his wife a stronger, more comprehensive view of the political world emerging around the colonies. As often as they could, the two wrote to each other. Updates Adams passed along from Continental meetings gave his wife a broader perspective than even Otis Warren and her family could offer her in letters. Adams told his wife in June of 1774 that the citizens of York saw the Boston Tea Party as "Mischief and Wickedness, than any where else"[55] insinuating that the patriot cause continued to be a minority effort. For Smith Adams, her letters focused on informing her husband on local events and political news; "great commotions have arisen in concequence of the discovery of a Tratorous plot of Colonel Brattle's—his advice to Gage to Break every commisiond officer, and to seize the province and Towns Stock of powder."[56] Though she often assumed that he knew of such events, she continuously wrote to him about news like this showing her hyperawareness of events. In her own way, Smith Adams' sharing of information in her letters makes it evident that her awareness of politics took precedence in her world now.

For both women, the battles of Lexington and Concord in 1775 proved to be an essential turning point in their political thinking. Both saw the events as game changing in terms of their personal allegiances. For Smith Adams, Lexington and Concord represented an end to peaceful relations with England. Frustrated with living on her own

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[55] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC01d080 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[56] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC01d099 (accessed April 10, 2012).

during the violence while her husband continued to live in Philadelphia, she wrote, "all our worldly comforts are now at stake—our nearest and dearest connections are hazarding their lives and properties…"[57] No longer willing to accept Britain's control in the colonies, Smith Adams dismissed the mother country's authority because it instigated and allowed a violent conflict to happen against innocent colonists. For Smith Adams, her sense of republicanism appeared less conservative than she was in 1773, perhaps influenced by her friendship with Otis Warren. Though she was willing to accept the fact that violence would occur between colonists and British forces, she consistently hesitated to pursue the matter aggressively in her own writing.

In reply, Otis Warren asked to be kept informed of events instead of offering her opinion or advice.[58] Unable to figure out the details of what happened, Otis Warren turned to one person she believed could adequately report information. At this point, John Adams' commitment to the Continental Congress gave his wife more information than Otis Warren could offer. The Warren family's connections to the political scene in the year leading up to the Declaration of Independence grew increasingly slim compared with their friends' connections. Though Otis Warren continues to be a leading influence on Smith Adams' political mind, it is curious to see her for the first time at a loss of control over the conversation on the political scene. Like Gordon Wood's *Radicalism of the American Revolution* suggests, deference made it so "no relationship could be exclusive or absolute; each was relative, reciprocal, and complementary."[59] Instead of holding all of the power in the relationship, Smith Adams began to take control of her own sense of political consciousness as Otis Warren deferred to her knowledge.

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[57] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:190.
[58] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:198-199.
[59] Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 57.

Although their educational backgrounds created a difference in their approach to politics, their early correspondence and friendship helped build a comfortable situation where they both felt at ease talking about controversial issues still considered unfeminine to discuss. Through their initial correspondence, Otis Warren influenced Smith Adams to develop a voice and opinion on political events. For her part, Smith Adams gave Otis Warren a friend to share viewpoints on the war as well as an ally to turn to when her connections to political news ran dry. As the War for Independence began, both women continued to reach out to each other and discuss their distrust of the British. As they bonded over their allegiance to the colonies, however, the shift in power between Smith Adams and Otis Warren continued to broaden as the Adams family grew closer to the center of colonial politics. From this change, both women struggled with their individual political identity and began to question their friendship.

Chapter 2:
Growing a Feminine Political Consciousness

Both Abigail Smith Adams and Mercy Otis Warren's experiences in Massachusetts prior to 1776 created a bond that influenced their opinions on political events. Smith Adams' lack of formal education and experiences growing up made it impossible for her to always agree with Otis Warren's opinion on actions taken by the British. Compared to Smith Adams, Otis Warren held a more radical view of how the colonies should react towards ideas like the Writs of Assistance or the Boston Massacre. To her, the growing tension around political power in the colonies could only be resolved by violence. Because the colonies lacked assertiveness over their own future, Otis Warren feared the control of the British would never end and events like the Boston Massacre would continue to terrorize and threaten the population. As a way to promote the patriot cause, Otis Warren wrote plays anonymously like *The Adulateur*, to make the public aware of British tyranny.

Though Mercy Otis Warren knew she pushed gender boundaries, she still continued to pursue a public voice while Abigail Smith Adams took much longer to feel comfortable arguing her own ideas to friends and family. Though she lacked the formal education that made Otis Warren confident in her opinions, Smith Adams gained a lot from her father's library. Smith Adams also gained much of her experience and knowledge through personal interactions with those who encountered losses during the French and Indian War. Learning the effects of war at a young age made Smith Adams highly sensitive to the impact violence had on society and led her to take a more conservative outlook on politics. With this emotional awareness, her marriage to John Adams pulled her into a more political environment that made her balance personal

experience with practical choices. Living in Boston during the Boston Massacre made her question the effectiveness of England's control over the colonies. If they were unable to control one minor situation with a group of Bostonians, Smith Adams began to question if England should even have a say in the way society ran.

As these two women grappled with their own expectations of England's influence over the colonies, they shared their thoughts and hopes with each other. For the majority of Abigail Smith Adams and Mercy Otis Warren's initial correspondence their conversations revolved around the growing tension between Massachusetts colonists and British leaders. At times, however, their thoughts drifted towards the bigger picture of relations with England especially as the War for Independence grew closer. By the start of 1774, Otis Warren wrote to Smith Adams that "it is and ever has been my opinion, that justice will finally gain a compleat victory over tyranny."[1] While Otis Warren did not witness conflict as Smith Adams occasionally did, their letters helped both understand the broader issues of conflict in the colonies.

Between March and June of 1774, England took measures to ensure the control of their colonies. Known today as either the Coercive or Intolerable Acts, these new laws shifted the popularity of England in the colonies from one of favor to disgust amongst the majority, particularly in New England where these new laws hit the hardest. The Boston Port Act, which shut down Boston's port especially turned New Englanders away from England. While this act focused on recovering England's losses from the Boston Tea Party, shutting down the busiest port in New England created a multi-colony revolt against the British. Not only did this act hurt the business in Massachusetts but it cut off

[1] Mercy Otis Warren, *The Mercy Warren Papers 1709-1841*, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1968), microfilm, 145.

the surrounding colonies from its supply of goods depended on for survival.[2] As Otis Warren and Smith Adams witnessed this struggle against British legislation, they both experienced a strengthened opinion against Britain.

By the beginning of 1775, the British continued to enforce the Coercive Acts, which suspended government activities and blockaded Boston's port. British soldiers from the Queen's Guard also camped in a nearby town of Marshfield between Boston and Plymouth. Though their purpose in staying near Plymouth was never announced, Otis Warren believed it to be England's way of provoking more violence among the colonists. Rather than allowing towns to live quietly on their own, Otis Warren wrote to Smith Adams that having a standing army so close to her home promoted a sense of unease around the community and she feared colonists would lose their patience and repeat the Boston Massacre.[3] Being able to write to Smith Adams about her fears comforted Otis Warren and highlights her equal sense of reliance on their friendship. Both also gained insight into what went on near their homes to prepare for the possible spread of unrest.

As colonists struggled to regain control, the British in charge asserted their power and dominance over their colonial subjects. In Otis Warren's hometown of Plymouth, many wealthy and prominent citizens living there were Tories who openly welcomed the British forces into their homes. Similarly, Smith Adams' Braintree dealt with British soldiers whose camps extended along the coast of Massachusetts. Beyond the fear of attack, Smith Adams complained to Otis Warren that the soldiers surrounding her community often got drunk and belligerent among the colonists. From these experiences apart from their actions in Boston, both Otis Warren and Smith Adams, like many of their

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[2] Kathleen Burk, *Old World, New World*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), 139.

[3] Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 71.

neighbors, increasingly saw standing armies as a threat to peace and preferred their towns free of English soldiers.[4]

On January 28, 1775, Mercy Otis Warren warned Abigail Smith Adams that the time to decide the future of the colonies was near. No longer willing to wait after so many changes were enforced on Massachusetts, Otis Warren's disgust with England began to be unmanageable as the monarchy continued to burden the colonies with taxes, blood, and fear.[5] As British forces grew stronger in the colonies, Otis Warren grew increasingly radical in her republican values which made independence from England necessary. The King's to work with the colonies and Britain's continuing presence in North America made it obvious to her that immediate change needed to be made by the colonists in their approach to England's power. Smith Adams, familiar with the effects of the Coercive Acts responded, "the die is cast… the most wicked and hostile measures will be persued against us—even without giving us an opportunity to be heard in our defence."[6] To Smith Adams, the inability of the colonies to have a voice in England, or in their own territories in North America, made violence the only option foreseeing that "the Sword is now our only, yet dreadful alternative…"[7] Both women saw these acts as a major turning point between the colonies and England. For Otis Warren, her play entitled *The Group* described her growing sense of oppression the British government forced upon the colonies.

Otis Warren's inspiration came from the British government's replacement of the Massachusetts Assembly with British councilors that asserted England's control over the

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[4] Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution*, 71-73.
[5] L.H. Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers: The Adams Family Correspondence*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963-), 1:181-183.
[6] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:183.
[7] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:183.

colony. As part of the Coercive Acts, England enacted the Massachusetts Government Act which let the crown decide who would have power in the colony. Although this change made Massachusetts' government like any other colony at the time it became an issue because the colony had, up to this point, asserted a fairly unique and strong control over its own government.[8] As Otis Warren sent out early drafts of *The Group* to her husband, she initially expressed concerns over the radical nature of her critique on British powers. Written in a way that could be seen by the crown as treason, Otis Warren had strong concerns over being a target to Tories because of her gender. Limited to the surrounding area of their home, most women still lived in isolation beyond their direct family. Because of their strict reliance on the home, women continued to be seen as beings incapable of understanding politics.[9]

Despite this stigma, Otis Warren continued to publish anonymously in order to avoid the cynicism and doubt her community could have unleashed upon her and her family.[10] While writing her ideas down as a play allowed Otis Warren more freedom in expression but it also contradicted her feminine role in society. The use of satire was not a trait society admired in women because it tarnished feminine amiability as women were expected to be seen and not heard.[11] James Warren, her husband, and Smith Adams thought *The Group* served as an excellent expression of her talents. Warren even sent the first two acts off to John Adams, who at this time resided in Philadelphia as a member of

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[8] Burk, *Old World, New World*, 139.

[9] Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 7-8.

[10] Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution*, 48-49.

[11] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), 121-122.

the Continental Congress, to get his opinion on the play.[12] After reading a draft of Otis Warren's play, Adams took it himself to a local printer in Philadelphia and distributed it among friends. Adams even kept James Warren updated on the plays' printing success, "one half of the Group is printed here [Philadelphia], from a Copy printed in Jamaica. Pray send me a printed Copy of the whole and it will be greedily reprinted here. My friendship to the Author of it."[13] Not only does Adams' letter show how Otis Warren's play became widely distributed in colonial society, but also that Adams took great pride in being friends with the Warrens. He would not have gone to the great lengths to make sure Otis Warren's words were printed if he did not fully believed in, and support, the person behind the words. The support shown between these two families also shows how tightly connected they were as the eve of the War for Independence loomed in their future.

While her plays may have been conversation pieces in taverns, the most important critic to Otis Warren was John Adams. Fearing that she stepped over gender boundaries in her critique of the British, Otis Warren trusted him to give her better insight into her actions.[14] On January 30, Otis Warren asked Adams for his opinion of her work, "your undisguized sentiments on these points will Greatly oblige a person who is sometimes Doubtful whether the solicitations of A Beloved Friend, May not lead her to indulge A satirical propencity that ought to be Reined in With the utmost Care and Attention…"[15]

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[12] It is unknown if Mercy Otis Warren knew of, or perhaps even encouraged, James Warren to send her play to John Adams. In letters to Abigail she frequently asks for the opinion of John on political matters so it is not farfetched to believe her husband acted on her own wishes; Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution*, 67-69.

[13] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=PJA03d010 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[14] Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution*, 69-70.

[15] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=PJA02d105 (accessed April 10, 2012).

Much like Smith Adams' friendship with Otis Warren, she deferred to Adams as a guide for her behavior knowing that, as a woman, she needed to follow gender expectations. By appealing to a well-connected friend like Adams, Otis Warren assured herself that her part in writing was just and reasonable. Although pieces of *The Group* no longer exist, what remains offers a view into Otis Warren's perspective of her growing confidence in asserting her personal views into political commentaries and how her work reflected a firm political consciousness.

In the opening scene two characters, Crusty Crowbar and Simple, question whether or not they should be loyal to the British crown. When asked by their friends why there is even a question to their loyalty, Crusty Crowbar responds;

> Himself [Rapatio]—his perfidy appears—
> It is too plain he has betray'd his country.
> And we're the wretched tools by him mark'd out
> To seal its ruins—tear up the ancient forms,
> And every vestige treacherously destroy,
> Nor leave a trait of freedom in the land.
> Nor did I think hard fate wou'd call me up
> From drudging o'er my acres,—
> Treading the glade, and sweating at the plough,
> To dangle at the tables of the great;
> At bowls and cards, to spend my frozen years;
> To sell my friends, my country, and my conscience;
> Prophane the sacred sabbaths of my God;
> Scorn'd by the very men who want my aid
> To spread distress o'er this devoted people.[16]

Within this opening dialog, Otis Warren highlighted the strong grasp the British government continued to hold over the colonists. Otis Warren, who knew of men like

[16] Mercy Otis Warren, *The Group*, (Alexandria: Chadwyck-Healey, Inc., 1996), http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_ap/uvaGenText/tei/chap_AM0082.xml (accessed April 10, 2012).

Crusty Crowbar that sold their loyalty for a price, focused on their double standards to prove her point against England. Freely acknowledging that the British government is wrong, these men go with the side that pays thee most for their loyalty. Showing loyalists like this further defined how she saw patriots like her brother, James Otis. Honest and true to their own values, the loyalty of true patriots could not be bought. One loyalist, Simple, recognized that the patriots held a legitimate cause against the British. Remarking how men like Brutus gave up hope of reconciliation after so many "repeated wrongs, arouse them to resent,"[17] Simple acknowledged the British brought the problem of independence upon themselves. Much like Crusty Crowbar's speech on Rapatio, Otis Warren used Simple's thoughts to justify the growing understanding that the patriot cause was one of justice and freedom from a repressive ruler.

Rapatio, a returning character, continued in *The Group* to portray Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson who continued to be a threatening presence in Massachusetts. Between the appearances of her first two plays, Benjamin Franklin publicly revealed a collection of letters between Hutchinson and the British government in England. In these letters Hutchinson asked for more personal power over Massachusetts as well as a standing army for him to control and use against the people of Massachusetts. Angered by the way the colonists treated him earlier by attacking his house, which Otis Warren used in her first play, Hutchinson decided that a tighter control over the people was necessary to his safety and sense of power. These documents proved to the growing number of patriots like Otis Warren that Hutchinson, in conjunction with

[17] Warren, *The Group*, http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_ap/uvaGenText/tei/chap_AM0082.xml (accessed April 10, 2012).

the British government, could not be trusted to serve the people of the colonies.[18] As Otis Warren's distrust of Hutchinson grew, Massachusetts colonists increasingly saw the British monarchy as a major threat to their personal freedom.

In *The Group*, Otis Warren, also discussed how the rights of women and families are ignored during episodes of violence and conflict. During this period women were a security measure to protect men's standing in society. As one of her characters, Hateall, expressed disdain for women remarking that "I broke her spirits when I'd won her purse,"[19] reflecting Otis Warren's own view of the impact of marriage over a woman. Although women did not hold many liberties before marriage, those who did gave up all future opportunities of freedom to their husbands. As the idea of independence expanded into society, Otis Warren naturally applied the same idea to women and expected it to be fulfilled for all white colonists. In the last scene of *The Group,* a single lady addresses the audience. Pronouncing the inevitability of violent battles between the British and the colonists, the lady foresaw "freedom's sons are Masters of the field"[20] but both sides would mourn great losses. Using a single female to foreshadow conflict enabled Otis Warren to portray women as innocent bystanders. Because of their roles at home, women recognized and understood the true impact war had on society and communities. Perhaps Otis Warren reflected on her letters with Smith Adams who worried over the possibility of war breaking loose as inspiration for including this perspective.

While the initial purpose of Otis Warren's play meant to take on the corrupt establishment of British power over the colonies, the inclusion of female roles in society

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[18] Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution*, 50-58.

[19] Warren, *The Group*, http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_ap/uvaGenText/tei/chap_AM0082.xml.

[20] Warren, *The Group*, http://xtf.lib.virginia.edu/xtf/view?docId=chadwyck_ap/uvaGenText/tei/chap_AM0082.xml.

allowed Otis Warren to insert a more personal view into public commentary. While James Warren never abused his power over Otis Warren it is clear that marriage, to her, signaled a loss of individual choice. As historian Nancy Rubin Stuart argued, Otis Warren attempted to show how "women's oppressed marital status paralleled Parliament's suppression of the American's 'natural rights.'"[21] Beyond trying to show these men as ruthless power-hungry loyalists, Otis Warren confidently connected feminine issues of power with that of the colonial cause against Britain. By making these connections publicly in her play, Otis Warren hoped to gain support for more freedom for women through association to the growing cause of colonial independence.

For Smith Adams, there appeared to be a similar disposition towards England after reading the latest news from the mother country. In February 1775, King George III publicly reasserted his control over North America with a promise to uphold the decisions made by Parliament to continue taxing the colonies. Though neither woman knew where these decisions would lead the colonies, Smith Adams asserted that she felt "the Sword is now our only, yet dreadful alternative."[22] Loosening her conservative approach that war did not have to be the answer to the growing tension, Smith Adams' personal acceptance to violence would soon be shaken with the battles of Lexington and Concord when the rest of North American society would finally begin to accept its path to war.

The "shot heard 'round the world" at Lexington created a firestorm of violence and chaos as England militiamen fought against colonial minutemen[23] who wanted to

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[21] Rubin Stuart, *The Muse of the Revolution*, 68.

[22] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:183.

[23] Minutemen were organized specifically by colonial towns as a way to ensure immediate protection. Because a majority of townspeople lived separately on farms, their reaction time to sudden

protect their local ammunition stores that British General Thomas Gage sought to confiscate. As British forces struggled to keep control among the chaos of colonial guerilla warfare tactics, these two battles ultimately ended in favor of the colonial minutemen.[24] Though both sides lost a considerable number of men in these battles, the success of the colonists in this early struggle gave many a false sense of security and power in what would soon become a full fledged war.

For the city of Boston, life during and after the battles at Lexington and Concord became more politicized as Loyalists feared for their lives and colonists actively revolted against British leaders. In response to the attacks, the *Boston News-Letter* represented the Tories who felt that the battles were caused by so many factors that it was impossible to discern "this shocking Introduction to all the Miseries of a Civil War."[25] The aftermath of Lexington and Concord led to many skirmishes between soldiers from both sides. David Ramsay, one of the earliest American Revolution historians remarked that the deaths caused by the battles of Lexington and Concord, "made them [colonists] consider it as a common cause… [and] proved the firm cement of an extensive union."[26] Bostonian unity would become even stronger as the British lay siege to their town almost immediately after losing to the colonists.

In an attempt to suppress Whigs in Boston, as well as establish a supply base through its port, the British took over the town as families struggled to escape the

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attacks made it hard to establish security. Men that did live in or around towns were essentially assigned jobs as minutemen due to their close vicinity to action. Though they were not uniformly trained they served as protection to hold off attacks until stronger, more reliable militia men could respond to threats.

[24] Burk, *Old World, New World*, 148-153.

[25] Frank Luther Mott, "The Newspaper Coverage of Lexington and Concord," *The New England Quarterly* 17 (Dec., 1994): 494.

[26] David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by R. Aitken & Son, 1789), 1:189, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY104147093&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

oncoming chaos. While colonial legislators in Massachusetts wrote letters to England in defense of their rebellious actions, in an attempt to control the foreign army from overrunning the colony, they could not stop soldiers from exploring areas surrounding Boston. After the deaths caused by fighting, the British soldiers in Massachusetts were met with resentment and disdain everywhere they went. Without a regulated army of their own, the people of Boston watched the British closely as they occupied their town in the months after Lexington and Concord.[27]

Smith Adams was dramatically affected by these events. Less than a month after the battles of Lexington and Concord, she wrote to Otis Warren that she no longer felt secure in Massachusetts because of the outbreak of violence. Though she accepted the actions of colonists as a necessary defense of their freedom, her conservative nature gradually lessened during the near constant news of violence in New England. Living in Braintree during Lexington and Concord, she struggled to live on her own while her husband stayed in Philadelphia. John Adams' absence hurt her ability to function as not only a mother and housekeeper but also protector of the Adams' family fortune. Though she expressed these concerns to Otis Warren, she still held on to her conviction that the violence occurring in Massachusetts was necessary to settle the growing differences between England and the colonies.[28]

Similar to Otis Warren's established connection with Whig ideology, Smith Adams' changing political stance aligned her closer to the growing radical Whigs against England. Apart from the natural tendencies of Whig ideology that promoted natural rights and the protection of those rights by the government, radical Whigs became a product of

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[27] Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, 1:190-192.
[28] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:190.

their increasingly hostile environment. Her own husband, John Adams, increasingly found himself tied to radical Whig arguments in Philadelphia as the tension between England and the colonies escalated. Living in Braintree, close enough to Boston to encounter British soldiers on occasion, made Smith Adams become more self-reliant upon her own skills than she ever needed to be before.[29] Smith Adams and Otis Warren's friendship now focused on not only their companionship in letters, but also in their similar political alliance. They both felt strongly about the actions colonists and British soldiers took surrounding Lexington and Concord and applied their theories to the ways in which they saw the world.

As both women became more aware of their environments at home, Smith Adams and Otis Warren picked up information wherever they could about the British. Though Smith Adams often complained of having to make decisions without John Adams' guidance, it allowed her to become better educated about the world around her. She took into consideration the events concerning British soldiers and she read newspapers to gain information on how the siege of Boston affected her source of supplies to survive at home. She also grew increasingly politicized as she saw the freedom of Massachusetts colonists being restricted by English forces. Smith Adams, along with the majority of women in the colonies, adjusted their lives to deal with the new influence of British forces in their communities. This change created new, self aware wives that looked for the first time at the world around them.

In response to Smith Adams' growing consciousness, Otis Warren's letter from May 15, 1775, acknowledged the shock that what they had so ardently desired, colonists taking a stand against the British, finally came to pass. Focused on the character and

[29] Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams,* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 69-70.

action of those who fought, Otis Warren praised their "Disinterested perseverance that has Hitherto appeared in their Resolutions Reflects a Lustre on their Characters which is A Ballence for the Hazzard."[30] Otis Warren, who lived in relative comfort with her husband and family in Plymouth, enjoyed more security at home than Smith Adams. Otis Warren did not worry as much over the financial burdens of living during a war, or protecting her children against the threat of British soldiers, because her husband remained at home for a majority of the war. This difference created a break in communication as neither woman could understand the other's burdens. For Smith Adams, as her interaction with Otis Warren no longer gave her the comfort expected, she turned to other correspondences. Directly following Lexington and Concord, most of Smith Adams' letters were directed to her husband. On May 24, 1775, she wrote to tell him about a false alarm over an attack made by the British. At first believed to be one directed towards Braintree, Smith Adams recalled how "men from all parts came flocking down till 2000 were collected"[31] until they noticed the British heading towards another town, Grape Island.

As Abigail Smith Adams became more aware of her surroundings and followed the path of British soldiers surrounding Braintree, she found herself in a new role among her peers; that of an informer. Because of her husband's active role in the Continental Congress amid these tense times, she became popular among her peers as a source of information that she requested Adams to be "as perticuliar as you *may*, when you write—every one here abouts come[s] to me to hear what accounts I have."[32] Though she does not mention specifics on the gender of those asking for information, her inclusion of the

[30] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:99.
[31] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:204.
[32] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:204-5.

word “every one” strongly implies that both men and women looked to her for updates. Not only does this new role imply a shift, however minor, in acceptance of women in politics, it also suggests a greater political consciousness within colonial society. Following this request, Smith Adams continued to ask her husband about life in New York and other nearby colonies. Wishing to get a better understanding of events, Smith Adams and her neighbors took note of all colony events rather than how just their world in Massachusetts was affected by events like the battles of Lexington and Concord.

Smith Adams, in seeking out her husband for information, slowly began to be less reliant on Mercy Otis Warren for her opinion of events. This changing dynamic over the course of the War for Independence created a gap between these two women that started to show as they diverged in opinion over the events of the war. As the War for Independence expanded, the letters between the two women gradually declined and dealt less with the war. Perhaps Smith Adams’ growing popularity among her neighbors also caused her to feel more accountable and in control of political knowledge. Rather than being the one seeking information from others like she used to do with Otis Warren, the war caused Smith Adams to become a leader among others. Though this position would take some getting used to, she adapted quickly and soon focused most of her attention towards the war and how events occurring around the colonies affected their position for freedom and power over Britain.

While they did not write frequently, a letter written on April 13, 1776, from Smith Adams responded to a request from Otis Warren for information. Though little is shared other than an admission that “I have more [information from] news papers than Letters”[33] it becomes apparent from Otis Warren’s position that she no longer held a great

[33] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:378.

connection to the political world. In another from April 27, Smith Adams mentioned that "I often receive large packages from P[hiladelphi]a. they contain as I said before more News papers than Letters, tho they are not forgotten."[34] It is clear from this reflection that Smith Adams was much more aware of the world around her than in previous years. Her focus on newspapers rather than correspondences from friends suggests that Smith Adams diligently looked after her own political education and awareness during the war. Rather than hear accounts from friends, she wanted to know the political discussions taking place in society outside of Massachusetts. Though her letter lacks a specific list of newspaper names, it is sufficient to deduce that Smith Adams read about a broad array of political events which shaped her own views of politics beyond the influence of Otis Warren.

In this letter to Otis Warren, Smith Adams also revealed her reflections on her "Remember the Ladies" letter. Telling John that she hoped the Continental Congress would declare independence soon, she reminded him that men would be amiss in forgetting to include the freedom of women in their fight. If forgotten, Smith Adams asserted that women all over the colonies would form their own rebellion to gain the rights to freedom and individualism they justly deserved.[35] After receiving a "very sausy"[36] reply from Adams, she wrote to Otis Warren in an attempt to draw her support for a petition to the Continental Congress for women's rights. Though she plays off her husband's comments, her plea for assistance from Otis Warren indicated that she, much like Otis Warren in her play *The Group*, took some interest in their gender's future and that they were aware of how influential the war could be in bettering their lives. Both

[34] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:397.
[35] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:370.
[36] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:397.

women saw the possibility for change in the cause of independence and spoke out in their own ways to promote equality. Though neither held high expectations for immediate change, both used familiar Whig ideology to support their arguments for gender equality.

Although their correspondence continued sparingly throughout the War for Independence, one letter Smith Adams wrote to Otis Warren may explain why they became less frequent. Answering another request from Otis Warren to see pages from her diary, she refused to share information through their letters because she was "apprehensive least my Letters should miscarry."[37] Though she remains unclear as to the reasoning behind her fear of having her letters discovered by enemy eyes, she made it clear that little to no information would be shared between them as the war continued on. As British soldiers occupied Massachusetts, it is probable that Smith Adams feared constant interception of letters to any of her acquaintances. If her letters were caught by the wrong hands with anti-British sentiment, she or her family may have been punished. It is unlikely at this point that Smith Adams purposefully withheld information from Otis Warren to disrupt their roles of deference since they willingly shared details of their experiences for so many years.

For Otis Warren, it is unknown how she felt about being cut off from information. While having her husband at home comforted her, it also meant that he did not participate in colonial legislation like John Adams. Without that constant presence in politics, Otis Warren knew that her family lost connections and favor with those active in government. Knowing that her main connection to political news would no longer share information through letters must have created some feelings of resentment. In a letter written by Otis Warren for Smith Adams on September 4, 1776, she chided her for never responding to a

[37] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 1:423-424.

previous letter. In her own words, Otis Warren expressed her delight at having the freedom to visit friends and family; "I hope when you Return to Braintree, you will Enjoy the stiller scenes, and take as much Delight in the Cares which Family Oeconemy Require, as one of your Acquaintance at Plimouth dos in her Domestic Circle."[38] Though Otis Warren comes off pleasantly in writing, it is difficult to see her so happy in domestic life after years of focusing her life around politics.

As Otis Warren periodically wrote to Smith Adams during 1776, she never received a reply from her once dutiful friend. In 1777, Smith Adams presented little information on the war to Otis Warren but did make it clear that she was shocked to learn that James Warren passed through Braintree without stopping by to pay his respects.[39] James Warren's lack of attention to Smith Adams clearly struck a nerve, but it is unclear as to why since their husbands remained friends. In her early relationship with Otis Warren, Smith Adams paid all the necessary compliments to her social superior but now that the tables had turned and the Adams family had risen in prominence among Massachusetts society she may have seen James Warren ignoring her as a social insult. By 1777 it is clear that Smith Adams no longer felt inhibited by deference and viewed herself as an equal to Otis Warren highlighting the start of the decline that deference held over their friendship.

Their differences seem to have been put to the side by May 21 when Otis Warren addressed a letter to Smith Adams going into detail over political rumors. "Have you any Late private Inteligence from that quarter, and do our Friends their Really think we shall

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[38] L.H. Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers: Adams Family Correspondence*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963-), 2:118.

[39] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 2:150-151.

be Invaded on all sides, or do they mean only to advise us to be Ready."[40] Though the letter Otis Warren responded to is missing, it shows that Otis Warren never stopped looking for information on the world around her. Both women were also aware of the loss of Fort Ticonderoga but neither wanted to go too far in their judgment until those "who have a better Right than myself have scrutinized, judged and Condemned."[41]

Regretting that her gender kept her from participating on the field, Smith Adams wrote to Otis Warren suggesting that she would have preferred to be born a man so that she could not be deemed an inactive citizen; "I could not live to endure the Thought of my Habitation desolated, my children Butcherd, and I an inactive Spectator."[42] Smith Adams' admission that violence did have its benefits showed a change in perspective beyond politics. She supported the idea that the war allowed men to protect what they love and cherish the most. This comment also shows that Smith Adams was aware of gender inequalities and while colonial men believed their wives to be content in their station, she shows that this was hardly the case.

At the same time that the colonies fought against British control, the friendship between Otis Warren and Smith Adams grew strained as John Adams gained political power for his involvement in the Continental Congress. While it would have been expected to see a strain in the relationship between James Warren and John Adams as they switched roles, it is particularly interesting that this tension seemed to only play out between their wives. Perhaps the reliance on their family connections for information and inability to publicly address others as women made them more invested in their husband's involvement. Otis Warren and Smith Adams' relationship continued through

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[40] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 2:244.
[41] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 2:312.
[42] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 2:314.

the final years of the war but their views slowly shifted away from each other as new legislation came into being. Under a new political forum, both felt a change in their relationship as their political affiliations transformed in the years after the War for Independence.

Chapter 3:
Debating a Constitution and the Dissolution of Friendship

Throughout their friendship, Abigail Smith Adams and Mercy Otis Warren helped shape each other's opinions on political and social events surrounding the War for Independence. While both women expressed similar concerns about the British leading up to the war, their friendship and correspondence by 1782 declined to be almost non-existent. After the War for Independence ended, Smith Adams grew more intimately connected through her husband, John Adams, to the creation of a new government. Otis Warren, whose family had once been a leading part of Massachusetts' government, lost all prominence in society by the time the Constitution was drafted. Without her father, brother, or husband playing a role in the foundling country's new system of government, Otis Warren found her once valued opinion ignored by the very men, and woman, who once praised her political mind.

Perhaps one of the leading factors in the decline of Smith Adams and Otis Warren's friendship resulted from Smith Adams' move to Paris in 1784. Unlike Otis Warren, who never traveled abroad, Smith Adams now experienced, rather than just read about, the world. Growing tired of being separated from her husband, which began in 1779 when Congress appointed John Adams as one of several diplomats to France, she finally made the move across the Atlantic Ocean after he failed to follow through on his promise that he would come home "with or without Leave, Resignation accepted or not..."[1] by 1783. Reading his letters on the slowness of foreign politics and acknowledging the improbability of his returning to Massachusetts in their foreseeable

[1] L.H. Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers: The Adams Family Correspondence*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963-), 5:96.

future, Smith Adams crossed the Atlantic to be with her partner. Above all else, her loyalty rested with her husband so much so that her own fears of leaving her family, friends, and life for a new experience across the Atlantic were insignificant because "the desires and requests of my Friend are a Law to me. I will sacrifice my present feelings and hope for a blessing in persuit of my duty."[2]

While on her way to Paris, Smith Adams' ship temporarily stopped in England giving her the opportunity to explore London for the very first time. This period of foreign exploration proved to be provocative in the way she thought about culture and politics beyond America's perspective. For the first time, she compared her life in Massachusetts to her imagining of English life. In a letter to her sister, Mary Smith Cranch, Abigail compared the town of Canterbury to Boston. Most notable to her were the number of "old Gothick Cathedrals" that loomed over the town with "a most gloomy appearance..."[3] Instead of inviting the devoted in, Adams saw the nature of England's churches as a reflection of the overall oppressive nature of European city life.

Though Canterbury did not meet Smith Adams' expectations, when she finally arrived in London her impressions of England improved except in one department: the women. While she met several people along her travels, Abigail Adams lamented that she could not find any European feminine equal to that of American ladies. The city of London itself could at times, she believed, be Boston's twin in terms of structure and economy but the women of London failed to live up to her standards of appearance and behavior. Smith Adams noted to her sister that English women failed to project "the softness peculiarly characteristick of our sex and which is so pleasing to Gentlemen," but

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[2] Butterfield, ed., *The Adams Papers*, 5:303.

[3] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC05d209 (accessed April 10, 2012).

instead adopted a "Masculine attire and Manners of Amazonians."[4] Perhaps Smith Adams ran into an opinionated, vocal group of women that talked openly of politics among men which went against her own views of feminine behavior. As for their shocking masculine appearance, women in England often rode on horses around town in riding habits which strongly resembled a man's attire.[5] What ever the case may be, it is clear that Smith Adams held American women to a higher standard above all others. Her observations also reflected her continuing loyalty to her country which will later be called into question by Mercy Otis Warren.

Particularly for Smith Adams, being in Europe introduced her to a new way of living and made her more conscious of public political presentation. Initially upon her arrival with her husband, the Adams family went through extensive introductions with political leaders. In a letter to her sister, Mary Smith Cranch, dated June 24, 1785, Smith Adams reflected on the ways in which life in North America was simpler, and cheaper, than London's metropolitan style. Her letter explains how she struggled to keep track of family finances. "Living at a hotel is I think more expensive than house keeping in proportion to what one has for their money. We have never had more than two dishes at a time upon our table, and have not pretended to ask any company and yet we live at a greater expence than 25 Guineys per week."[6] For Smith Adams, she found herself redesigning a majority of aspects in her life to live in England. Money, which had always been tight for her, remained one of the biggest issues for her to deal with and constantly came up in comparison to the more 'simple' life in America.

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[4] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC05d209 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[5] Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2009), 198-199.

[6] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC06d067 (accessed April 10, 2012).

Beyond keeping her husband in line with money, Smith Adams' experience in Europe was tarnished by British attacks against her and her husband. Following their departure from Paris in 1785, John Adams received another position as America's first ambassador to England following the War for Independence. To her sister Mary Smith Cranch, Smith Adams initially played off the verbal attacks as mere jealousy that an American could be welcomed equally among other, well established, foreign ambassadors. As she justified her position the real issue became evident as she mentioned her upcoming presentation to the King and Queen of England. For the Adams', neither knew how they would be treated among the most loyal British families and neither wanted to make a mistake on the part of their newly formed nation.

Although the meeting went pleasantly enough, her account of the day highlighted her own abiding sense of North American superiority to the monarchy. Abigail's views on the Queen and her ladies were especially biting; "title may compensate for want of personal Charms, but they are in general very plain ill shaped and ugly… I saw many who were vastly richer drest than your Friends, but I will venture to say that I say none neater or more elegant…"[7] While Smith Adams' experiences in England may not appear to be heavily influential in changing her political perspective, it does show her loyalty to the American image and virtue which would be challenged by Otis Warren. Living in Europe also gave Smith Adams more conviction in her ability to handle politics on her own. No longer reliant on Otis Warren, the role of deference ceased playing a part in their friendship.

[7] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC06d067 (accessed April 10, 2012).

John Adams became much more adept at conforming to different political atmospheres than Smith Adams due to his previous experiences in France and the Netherlands. As he dealt with foreign leaders, she struggled to find her way as a politician's wife in England. Unable to find many friends in a society filled with British loyalists who despised Americans, her already intense dislike of social statuses and rankings grew exponentially as she noticed the extreme differences in lifestyles between the rich and poor. Witnessing the differences in wealth, Smith Adams wrote to Elizabeth Cranch on September 2, 1785, that the poor were:

> coverd with disease and starving with hunger…I have been credibly informd that hundreds of Children from 4 years and upwards, sleep under the trees fences and Bushes of Hide Park nightly, having no where else to lay their heads… Yet has this Country as many publick institutions for charitable support of the infirm, as any country can Boast. But there must be some essential defect in the Government and Morals of a people when punishments lose their efficacy and crimes abound.[8]

For Smith Adams, she feared London's approach to the poor might influence American society which held the potential, she felt, to uphold its promise of equality for all. Rather than focusing on the political atmosphere of England, Smith Adams' letters to friends and family during this period discussed her discontent over the ways in which people abused power in the government. For the home she left behind in America, she felt sure that "economy and industery may retrive their affairs."[9] Retaining her optimism on the resourcefulness of Americans, Smith Adams' praise of their industry is another reminder that her loyalty never ceased during her time in Europe.

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[8] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC06d104 (access April 10, 2012).

[9] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC07d063 (accessed April 10, 2012).

Politically, Abigail Smith Adams returned to a more conservative Whig approach as she was before the War for Independence. As she became less radical, her sense of dependency on friends and family declined. Having the chance to see a world outside of her familiar surroundings created a new sense of authority over her own life. Moving so far away from home gave Smith Adams a fresh sense of independence which allowed her to explore her own interests in politics away from Otis Warren's influence. Smith Adams' sense of deference to Otis Warren no longer held the same influence and authority over political conversations she once had so their friendship naturally became less significant.

For Mercy Otis Warren, who stayed in Massachusetts as Abigail Smith Adams traveled to Europe, life after the War for Independence opened more doubts and questions over politics than answers. Assuming that women's growing social authority during the war would continue after fighting ended, women like Otis Warren were disappointed when they saw that their individuality continued to be controlled by coverture.[10] The inability of married women to break free from their husband's control caused Otis Warren to question the changes war brought to the newly established states.[11] As Otis Warren struggled to understand the female condition after the war, her understanding of new changes in the government made her further question the real implications of why Americans fought for independence.

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[10] Coverture meaning that women, under the law, were still completely under the control of their husbands. Their actions were reflected upon their husbands so great care was taken to make sure they stayed hidden from society.

[11] Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 139.

As the end of the war settled in, Otis Warren's optimistic expectations on the outcome of the War for Independence declined for multiple reasons. Based on the growing significance of Republican Motherhood in the overall support of the war, her view of events took on a personal tone. For women, they saw Republican Motherhood giving them enough political and social power to begin to be taken seriously as legitimate contributors to the newly independent states. Otis Warren believed that political participation of women in particular had to be an essential part of the new, independent nation. She believed that the chance to experiment and participate in the new political era would give women a stronger voice and influence over their children's lives. By informing and including the women who were held responsible for raising the nation's youth, Otis Warren believed it to be only fair to give women an equal voice.[12] The inability to get men to recognize the potential for including women caused Otis Warren to immediately doubt the promise of the independence movement.

Based in her Protestant faith, Otis Warren also believed that those who supported the cause of independence would receive benefits in life and death. With this spiritual devotion to the war and her expectations of radical results rising, her husband's inability to rise economically served as another setbacks that caused Otis Warren to denounce life after the war. Unlike Abigail Adams, whose husband John Adams continued to play a prominent role in politics, James Warren's public career floundered after his position as paymaster general during the war ended. At the same time, the Warren family dealt with financial issues, Otis Warren's father lay on his deathbed, four of her five sons were infected with smallpox, and her brother remained bedridden suffering from mental

[12] Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 65-87.

disabilities sustained from his earlier attack.[13] While many of her struggles may have been the same for many women during this period they almost certainly overwhelmed her and led to personal frustrations and private vendettas.

As early as 1776, Otis Warren experienced multiple personal trials that, when combined, radically changed her already liberal perception of politics. At the same time a break from Britain finally gained a voice in the colonies, her oldest son fell ill from a nervous breakdown. Fearing that her son would soon become an invalid like her brother, James Otis, Otis Warren struggled to keep her home together along with keeping the Revolutionary spirit alive. In 1778, her father finally succumbed to an undisclosed illness. On top of all of her other personal troubles, two years after the Battle of Yorktown her brother, James Otis, passed away. His passing took away her optimistic outlook on life free from British tyranny. [14] Personal pain, suffering, and loss made Otis Warren look pessimistically at the reality of independence because her early life held happier memories than her experiences during and after the war. To make up for her losses, she began to argue for a complete break from English example.

Another critical piece of Otis Warren's perspective needed to grasp at why her opinion of war and its leaders changed can be seen in how she came to terms with Shays' Rebellion.[15] For her, this rebellion served as the last reminder that the freedom and

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[13] Edith B. Gelles, "Bonds of Friendship: The Correspondence of Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 108, (1996): 50-53.

[14] Gelles, "Bonds of Friendship," 53-65.

[15] Essentially this rebellion became an economic creditor versus debtor issue. Farmers like Daniel Shays were struggling to make ends meet after the war decimated their lands while the land owners and men who supplied farmers with economic support began demanding repayments without consideration of the situation. As farmers began being jailed for not meeting payment deadlines, Shay and others began rioting and creating class conflict between the rich and poor citizens of America. The lack of control and violence that came about from this rebellion caused a majority to begin to doubt the effectiveness of the Articles of Confederation which had been the government in effect since the end of the War for Independence.

equality brought about by the break from Britain was not being upheld by the leaders responsible for protecting the promise of equality written in the Declaration of Independence. Specifically, Otis Warren saw the farmers questioning the motives behind the Articles of Confederation and shut down by the very government that promised them a voice.[16] At this forceful response, in addition to her other personal issues, Otis Warren's opinion on the growing changes turned her from a supportive ally to a concerned and critical citizen.

Although neither Otis Warren nor Smith Adams kept up with each other in the years directly following the War for Independence, Smith Adams kept up with her old friend through others. Before leaving for Europe, Abigail wrote to her husband on November 25, 1782, about the Warren family. In her short report Otis Warren's husband, James Warren, is brought up about his public presence in Massachusetts; "Generall W—n is chosen Member of C—s. I should be loth he should for the 3d time refuse as it leaves impression upon the minds of our good Citizens no ways to his advantage. But this good Man is some how or other embitterd."[17] Previously addressed under Otis Warren's perspective, her husband's lack of public promotion seemed to come from the family's inability to keep the public interested in them. For Smith Adams, however, it was apparent that James Warren chose not to take part in public services. Why James Warren turned down this opportunity to represent his community remains unclear but Smith Adams disapproved of her friend's avoidance of public duty.

For years after this report to her husband, Abigail's own sister Mary Smith Cranch brought up the Warren family to her while in Europe. "General Warren made

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[16] Gelles, "Bonds of Friendship," 65.

[17] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?&id=AFC05d022 (accessed April 10, 2012).

interest for L Govr but it raisd a Hornets nest about his ears, they have abused him shamefully."[18] For Cranch, the issue of running for Lieutenant Governor rested in the continuing popularity of Mr. Bowdoin who ran for reelection. No other information as to why the public reacted so strongly against James Warren is offered but one can see how this type of treatment may have affected Otis Warren's view on the changing environment of American society. Those in power before the war, it seemed, remained in control over the people. In May of 1786, Abigail Smith Adams sent one of the few letters that traveled between her and Mercy Otis Warren during her time in Europe. Focusing on the death of Charles Warren from tuberculosis, Smith Adams offered her sympathy and consolation to a suffering friend but also addressed a concern that the Adams' would never return to America. "I do not feel myself at all captivated, either with the Manners or politicks of Europe. I think our own Country much the happiest spot upon the Globe, as much as it needs reforming and amending."[19] Directly addressing the accusation Otis Warren brought against her, Smith Adams reiterated her view of America as an impossible world to overcome.

As both women dealt with their own lives, one major event would bring them together and split their friendship apart. After Shays' Rebellion threatened the security of the Articles of Confederation in place, many leaders of the thirteen states believed it was time to come up with a new form of government. Mercy Otis Warren's commentary on the proposed new government appeared in 1788's pamphlet, *Observations on the New Constitution, and on the Federal and State Conventions By a Columbian Patriot*. In

[18] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?&id=AFC07d034 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[19] *The Adams Papers*, in The Massachusetts Historical Society: Digital Editions, http://www.masshist.org/publications/apde/portia.php?id=AFC07d070 (accessed April 10, 2012).

addition to her own personal losses during the war and Shays' Rebellion, the Constitution became another force that she believed repressed the spirit of independence. She saw once ideal, patriotic leaders now fighting for a Constitution to control the country for their own economic and political gain. Men like Alexander Hamilton and James Madison sought to "betray the people of the United States, into an acceptance of a most complicated system of government."[20] Taking on the newly formed government based on her personal interests, Otis Warren formed a defense very similar to that of Anti-Federalists against the Constitution.

In her attacks against the Constitution, Otis Warren focused on two major themes that she saw directly threatening society's well being. By forming a new government, Otis Warren feared that a lack of balance between the proposed three branches of government ruined any chance for citizens to run their own lives. The possibility of a standing army and a lack of protection for individual rights of expression were just a few of the issues Otis Warren saw with the Constitution. Especially concerning freedom of speech, Otis Warren believed the Constitution to be a direct attack on the ability to publish or express views openly. As an increasing number of men pushed for a Bill of Rights to ensure the protection of basic liberties, Otis Warren rallied behind the Anti-Federalist cause.[21] The ability of politicians to "determine their own salaries" and the idea

[20] Mercy Otis Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution, and on the Federal and State Conventions By a Columbian Patriot*, (Boston: [s.n.], 1788), 7, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af= RN&ae=CY102312752&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[21] Anti-Federalists, as opposed to Federalists, feared big government and preferred to keep power at the state level. Focusing more on the individual's power over their personal well-being, Anti-Federalists fought against the Constitution but gave in after a Bill of Rights was added to protect individual rights against big government power.

that "one representative to thirty thousand inhabitants"[22] was sufficient for the government infuriated Otis Warren and justified her belief that the Constitution allowed elites to favor their desires over the majority. As the few men in charge grabbed power over the people, Otis Warren predicted that;

> we shall soon see this country rushing into the extremes of confusion and violence, in consequence of the proceedings of a set of gentlemen, who, disregarding the purposes of their appointment… have unnecessarily rejected the confederation of the United States and annihilated the sovereignty and independence of the individual governments.[23]

Similar to typical male Anti-Federalists like Thomas Jefferson, Otis Warren disliked the ways in which the Constitution took power away from the states. To her, this meant less individual freedom and more chances for government to take advantage of their power.

The other major issue Otis Warren held against the Constitution dealt with the way it made society more reliant on political figures for change over their own abilities. In her mind, the Constitution held the potential to take away the powers of the people to govern themselves. Much like her experiences with Massachusetts' Governor Thomas Hutchinson, Otis Warren tried in her pamphlet to express old concerns of letting a small number of people gain power over everyone; "the authors of the present visionary project… may then make the same inglorious boast with this insidious politician [Hutchinson], who may perhaps be their model, that 'the union of the colonies was pretty

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[22] Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State Conventions*, 22, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY102312752&srchtp=a&ste=14.

[23] Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State Conventions*, 16, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY102312752&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

well broken, and that he hoped never to see it renewed.'"[24] To her, the success of the new nation precariously rested in the hands of the people who had to watch over the politicians as they threatened to tear apart an already stable society. Her experiences in Massachusetts made it difficult for her to accept a government that suggested an overarching power to rule over the independent states.

Otis Warren perceived the Constitution as an attack against the values fought for in the War for Independence. The leaders she once revered now became a target of her work. In her view, men before the war left behind their personal desires for the overall success of independence and reflected the virtuous, disinterested men that early colonial society sought as ideal leaders.[25] Once success had been secured, she saw them taking advantage of their positions as leaders to grasp more power through the Constitution. Stuck under pre-Revolutionary expectations, people like Otis Warren doubted the sincerity of political leaders as they created a new government without the consent of every citizen.

From her earlier plays, leaders like Brutus and Cassius fought to create a new world in North America free from British control. After working on plays that expressed her opinion on political issues in Massachusetts before the war, Otis Warren felt justified in continuing to voice her opinion on how she saw events missing its fullest potential for change. Otis Warren expected Samuel Adams, John Adams, George Washington, and other leading men of America to take significant steps away from the life England pushed

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[24] Warren, *Observations on the New Constitution and on the Federal and State Conventions*, 13, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY102312752&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[25] To be disinterested in Colonial America meant that men were not tempted to gain political influence for their own personal gain. These men were typically seen as disinterested because of their background. Ideally they were well educated, wealthy, and influential in their communities so they would not be tempted at wanting more power. For more see: Gordon Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 16-23.

upon the colonies. Instead, Otis Warren thought the Constitution felt too much like the system that Britain used.[26]

In *Observations on the New Constitution,* Otis Warren, among other Anti-Federalists like Patrick Henry, held a different view from Federalists, like Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, of how the colonies needed to move on after war. Seeing themselves as protectors of independence, Anti-Federalists sought to portray the new emerging government as the very thing soldiers fought against in the War for Independence. As historian Bernard Bailyn suggested, Otis Warren "could never clear her mind of the dark vision of her ancient enemy, Thomas Hutchinson, who she never ceased believing had been a tool of absolutism…"[27] Unable to separate her earlier experiences in Massachusetts with her fears on the Constitution, Otis Warren could never admit to the potential of the Constitution because she could only see the threat of control and the continuation of her personal downfall.

Abigail Smith Adams' view on the Constitution was vastly different than that of Mercy Otis Warren. Though her experience in Europe did not cause her to change the way she perceived America, they did change the way she thought politics and public office should be presented to the public. Though many Anti-Federalists complained that the Constitution opened the way for monarchy to be reestablished in American society, she saw the new government as an important stepping stone using old ideas in a new way. The Constitution promoted tradition and celebrated the differences of America from its European ancestors. For both Adams', however, their ideas of tradition sometimes

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[26] See more in: Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, 235.

[27] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 331.

went too far for a majority of Americans to agree with. In particular, their idea of titles for the leader of the nation created too much controversy and resemblance to a monarchy that could not be surpassed by either's logic.[28] Compared to Otis Warren, Smith Adams trusted the political leaders of the period to make the right decisions for the nation. Though she and her husband continued to reside in England during the start of debates, they both knew that America needed a strong, unified government in order to successfully interact with other nations like England, France, and Spain. Because Smith Adams held a broader world view of the political scene at this time, she put the freedom of individuals behind the power of the national government without hesitation.

John Adams sent in his letter of resignation to return home to America soon after the debates over the Constitution began but it would take a year before they physically reentered the political world of America. While Smith Adams freely critiqued James Warren's lack of interest in public service, it could be argued that she held too strong of an interest in the new government to be considered an unbiased supporter. Though she never wrote about her intentions, Smith Adams had once been deeply connected with the bond business. Under the new government it was almost guaranteed that she would make a massive profit from the federal government.[29] Because she remained in England for the heaviest part of debates on the Constitution, she did not openly write about the new government as much as Mercy Otis Warren did. This lack of source material makes it difficult to fully understand her thoughts and ideas on the Constitution. While neither Otis Warren nor Smith Adams entered into debate with each other during this time in

[28] Lynne Withey, *Dearest Friend: A Life of Abigail Adams*, (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 211.
[29] Holton, *Abigail Adams*, 252.

their letters, their friendship declined as it became clear that neither could accept the others point of view.

By 1789, Smith Adams' fondness for the Warren family had worn thin after hearing about their actions while she was away in Europe. To her sister, Mary Smith Cranch, she explained her feelings:

> I know no other equally ambitious, but I presume her pretentions & those of her Family will fail, as I think they ought to if one Quarter part is true which has been reported of them… I hope they will never have sufficient interest to disturb the Government… She told me upon her last visit, that she did not perceive any alteration in *mr A*'s conduct towards them. I am sure she must have told what was not true if she had said there was none in mine, for I felt it, and I cannot deceive. with regard to mr A he has dealt by them like a sincere Friend, and an honest Man and their own Hearts must approve his conduct, however grateing to their feelings. I am most sincerely sorry for the cause. they were my old and dear Friend's for whom I once entertaind the highest respect.[30]

Mercy Otis Warren's behavior over the past years had taken its toll on Smith Adams' patience. The sense of self-entitlement to power was not something she felt Otis Warren or her husband deserved from their lack of service to the public.

The work Otis Warren is best known, and which sundered the final connections to Smith Adams, took her decades to research and write. *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* discussed nearly every event from the Stamp Act in 1765 to George Washington's retirement from the Presidency. Praised by Thomas Jefferson yet ignored by John Adams, because of her over-glorification of events, this work brought together the evolution of her ideas on the founding of America

[30] L.H. Butterfield, *The Adams Papers: Adams Family* Correspondence, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963-), 8:390.

into one comprehensive text.[31] Writing as each event unfolded in front of her, Otis Warren's work is a rare personal, and perhaps one-sided, account of how major events in history shaped and influenced a woman's thoughts.

As Otis Warren's experiences in Massachusetts attached her psychologically to the cause of the War for Independence, her work in *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* shows how she understood events and helps explain why people of the time saw certain men as important leaders. To Otis Warren, before the War for Independence, Samuel Adams was a poor, but good, man that could be trusted to do what was best for the people; "his mind was replete with resources that dissipated fear, and extricated in the greatest emergencies."[32] As someone she knew personally, Samuel Adams served as the pinnacle of what it meant to be a patriot.[33]

In her work, the drafting and signing of the Declaration of Independence is one important event to understand what Otis Warren thought the founders stood for. Idealizing events, Otis Warren argued that the Declaration created a "distinct people, who claimed the rights, the usages, the faith, and the respect of nations, uncontrolled by any foreign power. The colonies thus irretrievably lost to Great Britain, a new face appeared

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[31] Katharine Susan Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution*, (New York: Kennikat Press, 1958), 202-210.

[32] Mercy Otis Warren, *The History of the Progress, Rise, and Termination of the American Revolution*, (Boston: Printed by Manning and Loring, for E. Larkin, No. 47, Cornhill…, 1805), 1:212, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY103461156&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[33] As reported by Otis Warren, both Samuel Adams and John Hancock became too well-known for their rebellion against British power that they essentially served as the faces of rebellion. More outspoken than other rebels, the British saw their deaths to be essential to stopping the rising tensions against Britain among the colonies. For more see: Warren, *The History of the Progress, Rise and Termination of the American Revolution*, 1:210-211, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY103461156&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

on all affairs, both at home and abroad."[34] For Otis Warren, the War for Independence represented republican values that men initially embodied in their own lives. Of those men leading events, John Adams, who continued to be friendly with the Warren family is particularly praised for being the one who was the most passionate and convincing in supporting its creation. Of Adams she wrote, "he rose with a face of intrepidity and the voice of energy, and invoked the *god* of *eloquence*, to enable him to do justice to the cause of his country…"[35] suggesting that her intentions in writing her account were not quite aimed at making old friends her new enemies.

A change in her perspective appears in the final third volume of her work which included a reexamination of life after the War for Independence and the Constitution. The Adams family, to Otis Warren, betrayed the war's purpose for complete separation from England. Although she continues to praise John Adams' intellect, many of her compliments showed his participation as an example of how the war transformed people negatively. Otis Warren argued that spending five years in Britain made John Adams "so enamoured with the British constitution, and the government, manners, and laws of the nation, that a partiality for monarchy appeared, which was inconsistent with his former professions of republicanism."[36] Spanning several pages in her book, Otis Warren charged Adams with purposefully seeking out those who supported monarchy because his "former opinions were beclouded by a partiality for monarchy," moving him farther

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[34] Warren, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 1:311, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY103461156& srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[35] Warren, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 1:307, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY103461156& srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

[36] Mercy Otis Warren, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, (Boston: Printed by Manning and Loring, for E. Larkin, No. 47, Cornhill…, 1805), 3:392, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY103462033&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

and farther away from "the principles of the American revolution, which he had advocated for near twenty years."[37] Though her earlier volumes praised John Adams as a person, it is evident that Mercy Otis Warren struggled with understanding her perceived changes in old family friends.

As soon as John Adams read about the things Mercy Otis Warren wrote about him, he attempted to defend himself in a series of letters to her. Neither Mercy Otis Warren nor the Adams family would be willing to listen to the other side as a reasonable voice. Mercy Otis Warren, who up until the publication of *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, had been friendly to the Adams family could no longer hide her discontent. Unwilling to back down from her opinions, she appeared to accept the silence that followed. John Adams, who became a mentor to Otis Warren, no longer held power over their friendship much like Smith Adams' decreased reliance on Otis Warren. She ceased to respect and look to Adams for guidance because she saw him abandoning their original desires for independence. Deference in this triangle no longer played a role in any of their lives. Each party knew exactly what they wanted and ignored those who disagreed. In the nine years that remained of her life, she neither wrote to nor received a letter from the Adams household. If any party wished for a reunion similar to that of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson it was never vocalized to another soul or written on a piece of paper for posterity to find.

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[37] Warren, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 3:392-4, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY103462033&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed April 10, 2012).

Conclusion:
The Female Revolution

Their friendship ignited in both women a passion for politics. Deference initially created a sense of obligation for Smith Adams and Otis Warren to help each other but as the war grew it increasingly became difficult to keep up with each other. As the war separated them, they both experienced changes that made them grow independently of each other. For Abigail Smith Adams, more so than her husband, the connection to Mercy Otis Warren ended upon her return to America. Though they once shared political beliefs, she grew tired of Otis Warren's radical, liberal nature and constant desire for more power despite James Warren's lack of interest in promoting the welfare of Massachusetts society. By the time the colonies earned independence, both women established their political beliefs so strongly that neither would sacrifice their ideas to follow the other. Smith Adams and Otis Warren experienced similar events surrounding the war but the Constitution created diverging paths for all citizens no matter their race or gender in America.

Both Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams were two exceptional women of their time who had a lot of support in their political endeavors. As was shown in chapter one, both women held above average opportunities at education which allowed them to understand politics better than most women of their generation. They both learned the art of writing and expressed their thoughts in a heightened sense equal to that of any male political figure of their time. Their "specialness" in society and connections to the leaders of Massachusetts, however, does not mean that they were destined for political interests. Something inside both of their minds, independent of outside

influences, led them to politics and was strong enough to go against the very environment they lived in that told them they were not capable to contribute.

If Mercy Otis Warren had not lived in Massachusetts, Abigail Smith Adams still would have become her husband's politically minded wife. Their friendship was not about making each other politically active, but rather focused on helping each other understand the meaning of events in the greater context of the world they lived in. Their disappointments in the aftermath of war, especially dealing with the lack of interest given to women's rights, showed how devoted they both were to the cause of independence. Politically, the Constitution proved to be the breaking point in their relationship. Over the years, both Otis Warren and Smith Adams fought for what they believed in together, but as politics separated their experiences, neither woman felt like they could support the other's choices.

To Smith Adams, Otis Warren used politics only as a means to gain power and maintain influence in society. To Otis Warren, Smith Adams' time in England made her adopt an extreme conservative, monarchial approach to politics that threatened to undo the work of patriots in establishing a new society. Her acceptance of the Constitution supported fears that it would in fact create a political mirror image of monarchy in America. Their affiliations with the Federalist and Anti-Federalist parties, while minor because of their sex, made it impossible for their friendship to survive under the adoption of the Constitution. For these two women in early American society, they lived their lives much like any other woman but fought politically for what they believed. Their desire to be participants in a male dominated society, and their ultimate success in doing so,

highlights the strong, active female society often overshadowed by Founding Father history.

The friendship between Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams proved that women held a revolution of their own beyond the domestic sphere. As introduced by Gordon Wood, the idea of deference for men affected the way they lived and influenced their ability to rise socially and ended as the war opened up new opportunities and freedom for men. The same can be applied to Abigail Smith Adams' friendship with Mercy Otis Warren. Though her husband certainly held the potential to rise socially on his own, his future was unknown to Smith Adams who jumped at the opportunity to befriend a well known member of Massachusetts society. While women may not have expected these friendships to create new opportunities outside of the home, the fact that they used roles of deference supports the argument that women managed their lives and payed attention to ways in which they could improve their domestic station.

Like Wood's argument, roles of deference created a dual dependency between friends until the War for Independence made these relationships less important. Over time, Otis Warren looked to Smith Adams for information on the war when her own political connections faltered. Smith Adams found her new role as informer to Otis Warren, and others in her community, a refreshing and inspiring position. No longer dependent on others, she took control of gathering information for herself and grew independent of Otis Warren's influence. Even more inspiring to Smith Adams was her move across the Atlantic to live in France and England with her husband following the War for Independence. Unlike Otis Warren, Smith Adams benefitted from seeing the world outside of North America and helped her gain a new sense of independence.

Recognizing her ability to deal with political and social change, Smith Adams let go of her reverence of Otis Warren and viewed herself equal to her once intellectually superior friend.

While these two women struggled within their relationship of deference, their individual sense of republicanism blossomed. Like Bernard Bailyn's examination of the male perspective, Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams highlighted how women were equally capable of going through "the realization, the comprehension and fulfillment, of the inheritance of liberty…"[1] Otis Warren especially promoted Bailyn's idea by publishing plays of her political beliefs. Both women openly discussed politics in their letters not only to each other, as a way to inform and better understand events, but also to their friends and family. Both women understood the world as men did; they openly acknowledged the wrongs done by the British and desired independence when no other avenues were open. The main difference in their republican values slowly developed as Smith Adams' conservative nature frustrated Otis Warren's radical liberal demands over the Constitution. Like many men at the time, these two women found it impossible to compromise or agree on any topic concerning the new government because of their own ideas of republicanism.

As each of the three chapters have shown, Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams exemplified the revolution women, while mostly elite, felt surrounding the War for Independence. Like many of the popular arguments historians have made over masculine revolutions, it is clear that women held just as much at stake. While neither would reach out to resolve the deterioration of their friendship, this further suggests the

[1] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 19.

seriousness in which they pursued and believed in their political alliances. While popular history may only remember the impact war had on men, Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Smith Adams are examples of how the War for Independence radically transformed women into pursuing their political interests.

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