



# Republican Motherhood

## “A Crisis of Republican Virtue”

After the Revolutionary War, how would new Americans born into this country develop “civic virtue”?

How would America instill proper republican values in its citizenry?

The answer?

“Republican Motherhood”





## Republican Motherhood

View that women were at least partly (and some argued *mostly*) responsible for fostering early “republican virtues and ideals of democracy and liberty” in the youth of America

Had its origins in Enlightenment ideas → sparked a debate over women’s rights

# John Locke & The Glorious Revolution

## *First and Second Treatises on Government (1690)*

1. Nuclear family is the “base unit” of any free society with wives as key figures that are co-equals with husbands
2. Motherhood puts a woman on an equal footing as man
3. Argued for a more “gender-neutral” sense of man
4. Women might be subordinate in society, but it is not her “destiny”

\*Considered progressive/liberal viewpoint of women’s rights in the 1600s\*



All men by nature are equal in that equal right that every man hath to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man; being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions.

Marquis de Condorcet: *“Sur l'admission des Femmes au Droit de Cite”* (“On the admission of women to the rights of citizens” - 1790) argued women:

- Had the right to speak out in public
- Were reasonable and sensible
- Were very often leaders
- Possessed morality
- Are people, and therefore, must not be unfairly ruled

- Links ideas to taxation
- Male tyranny negates the concept of liberty



- Also argued women were obviously men's equals except in matters requiring brute strength
- Believed access to and improving education would readily narrow what gaps existed



# Jean Jacques Rousseau

“Noble Savage”: an idealized indigenous person, outsider, or "other" who has not been "corrupted" by civilization, and therefore symbolizes humanity's innate goodness

Rousseau believed women to be “noble savages”  
– closer to nature although capable of citizenship

"The men depend on the women only on account of their desires; the women on the men both on account of their desires and their necessities: we could subsist better without them than they without us" - Rousseau

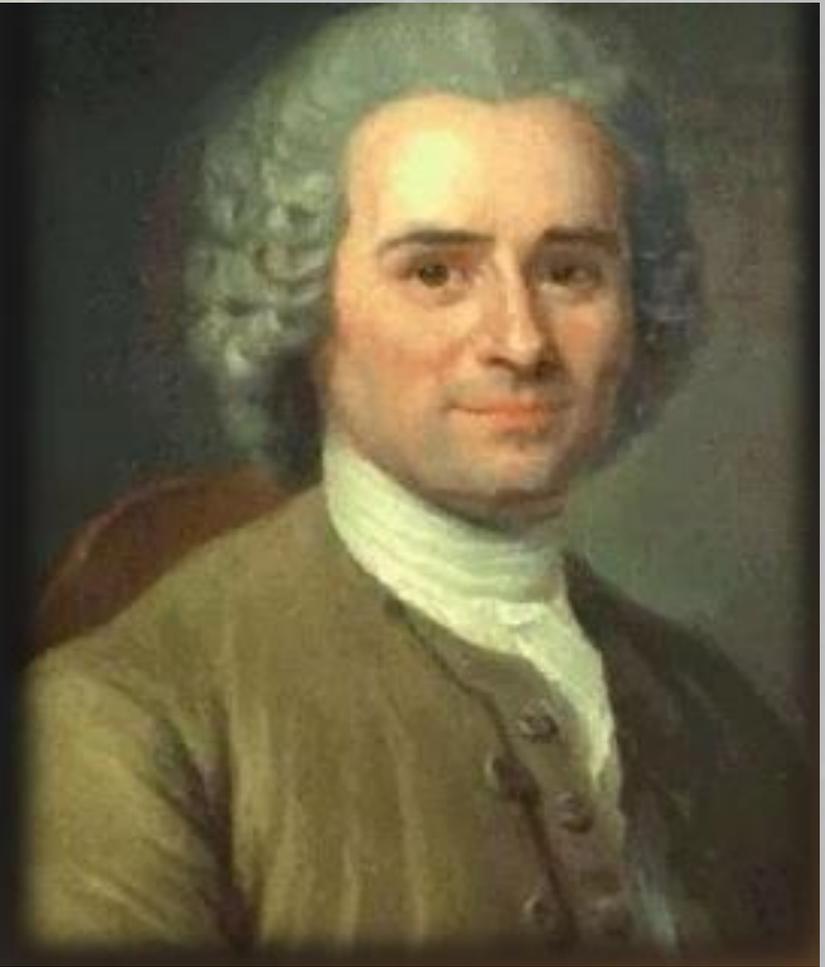


# ROUSSEAU

*(French Philosophe)*

*Emile (On Education)*

“Mother, do not make a decent man out of your daughter. Make a decent woman out of her.”



“What is most wanted in a woman is gentleness...A man, unless he is a perfect monster, will sooner or later yield to his wife’s gentleness, and the victory will be hers.

Once it is demonstrated that men and women neither are nor, and should not be, constituted the same, either in character or in temperament, it follows that they should not have the same education...”

# Mary Wollstonecraft

(1780s-90s)

- Criticized Rousseau's antiquated view of the sexes
- Advocated equal access to education



**VIRTUE CAN  
ONLY FLOURISH  
AMONG EQUALS.**

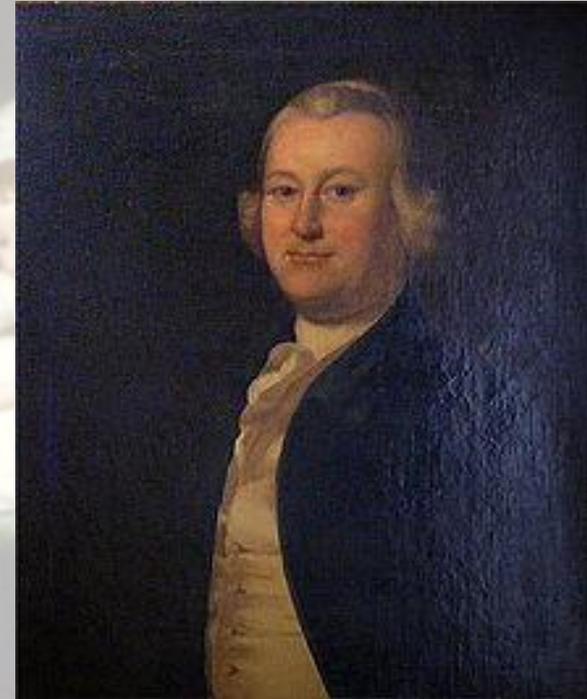
Men and women must be educated,  
in a great degree, by the opinions and  
manners of the society they live in.

## American View of R.M. - James Otis

- If we based American ideals around the Social Contract, he wanted to know who were those present and who were thus parties involved in said contract

"Who acted for infants and women, or who appointed guardians for them? Had these guardians power to bind both infants and women during life and their posterity after them?

...Are not women born as free as men? Would it not be infamous to assert that the ladies are all slaves by nature? If every man and woman born or to be born has and will have a right to be consulted and must accede to the original compact before they can with any kind of justice be said to be bound by it, will not the compact be ever forming and never finished?"



## Otis's Embarrassing Question on the "New Republic"

"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? Were these and ten millions of other such...consulted?"



## Abigail to John, 31 March 1776

“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 perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.



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



## John to Abigail, 14 April 1776

“I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient -- that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent -- that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented. We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems.... which would compleatly subject Us to the Despotism of the Peticcoat.... A fine Story indeed.



**Abigail to John, 7 May 1776**

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



The Republican Mother's patriotic duty was to educate her sons to be moral and virtuous citizens & her daughters to become Mothers of the Republic



## Endowing Domesticity with “Political Meaning”

- Consumer boycotts infused daily activities and household production with political meaning
- Households provided goods and services to soldiers and were places to which embattled came for supplies, housing, laundry, clothing, nursing
- The expanded role of households during the war was given a new twist in early Republic

“Mothers of the Republic, and Mothers of Republicans”





Did this link her directly to “state” and give her a degree of political influence?

