



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. Women’s subordination is a result of sin, not by God’s decree

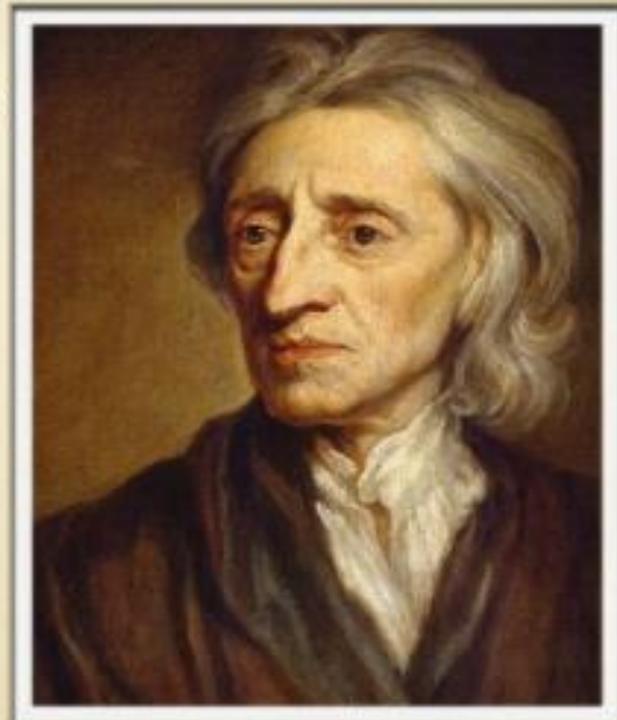
### **John Locke** (1632 - 1704)

Challenged the traditional form of government:

**Monarchy & Divine Right**

Instead, he proposed:

**Social Contract**

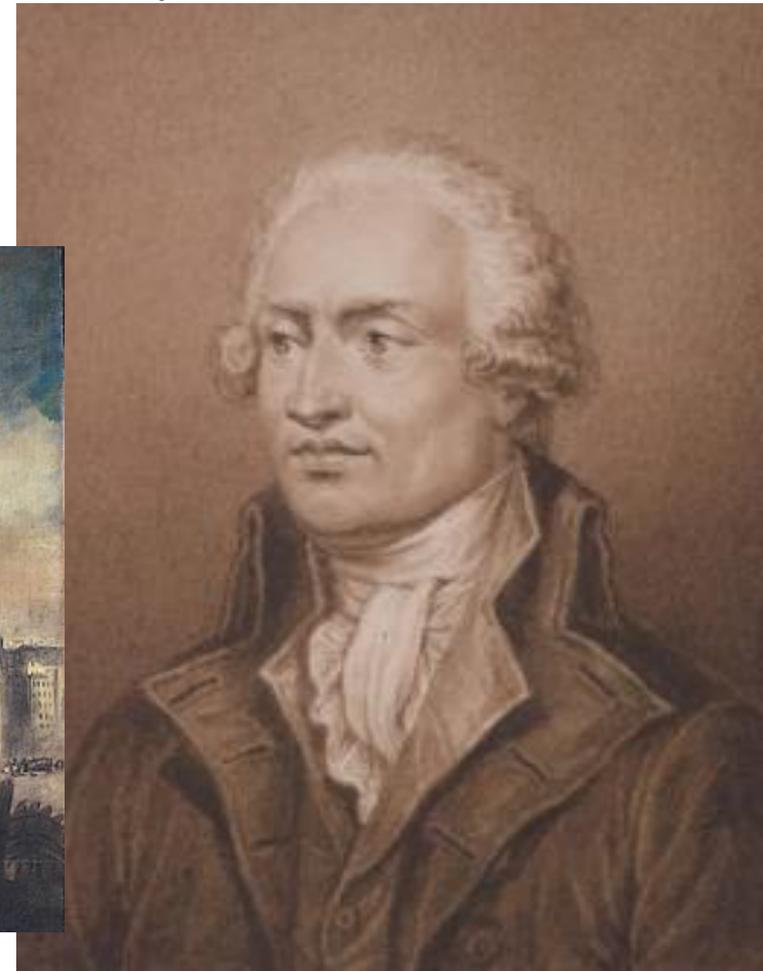


*Portrait of John Locke.*  
Sir Godfrey Kneller, 1704.

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



# Mary Wollstonecraft

-Criticized Rousseau's antiquated view of the sexes



**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.

## 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? What will there be to distinguish the next generation of men from their forefathers, that they should not have the same right to make original compacts as their ancestors had? If every man has such right, may there not be as many original compacts as there are men and women born or to be born? 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?"



## 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”



The Republican  
Mother's patriotic  
duty was to educate  
her sons to be moral  
and virtuous citizens

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

