

The Rebel Lady

Mercy Otis Warren and Female Intellectual Discourse in Revolutionary America
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Introduction

In the middle of the American Revolution, ardent patriot Mercy Otis Warren wrote to eminent British historian Catherine Macaulay to relay the significant events of the war. At the end of a long and newsy letter, Warren self-identifies in an interesting way; as a “rebel lady.”² She cautions Macaulay against writing if correspondence between the two would endanger Macaulay’s reputation. Though contextually Warren’s rebellion lay chiefly in her sympathies with the cause of the Revolution, her foray into the public sphere reveals another sort of “rebellion.” Warren lived from 1728 to 1814 and observed the birth of the American Republic, largely through the lens of her connections with prominent members of Revolutionary society. She was the sister of eminent patriot James Otis, Jr. and wife to Massachusetts politician and prosperous landowner, James Warren.³ She was a prolific poet, playwright, and correspondent in addition to penning the three-volume *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*. In her writing, Warren did not shy away from her femininity, but rather

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² Mercy Otis Warren to Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay, Plymouth, February 15, 1777 in *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, Jeffrey Richards and Sharon Harris, ed., (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 92.

³ Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Women’s Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution*, (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1995).

used it to frame her intellectual inquiry in a male-dominated field. Warren's historical writing and semi-public correspondence demonstrate the politicization of domestic female life at the time of the American Revolution.⁴

Femininity in the *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*

Warren commences her three-volume work with "An Address to the Inhabitants of the United States," in which she describes her aims in writing a comprehensive history of the American Revolution. She sets the stage for her work in the opening statements of her preface by stating that she writes "at a period when every manly arm was occupied...either in the cabinet or the field."⁵ As a result, Warren claims that she has been "induced to improve the leisure Providence had lent."⁶ Warren acknowledges that her position as a woman provided her with an abundance of time to contemplate the events of the Revolution and supplied a clear vantage point from which she could record the history of the war. She states that the events of the American Revolution penetrated her "quiet cottage" and "stimulated to observation a mind that had not yielded to the assertion, that all political attentions lay out of the road of female life."⁷ Warren believed her gender did not disqualify her from pursuing her task. She then addresses those who might have reservations about the *History* based on her sex and reminds them that, "every domestic enjoyment depends on the unimpaired possession of civil and religious liberty, that a concern for the welfare of society ought equally to glow in every human breast."⁸ In acknowledging her gender, Warren allowed herself to be identified and defined by it; however, she refused to be bound by the idea that "political attentions" lay outside of female concerns. Nor did she advocate female emancipation; rather she acknowledged that the events of the Revolution permeated all corners of society, including the domestic felicity of the household.

Beyond merely introducing herself as a woman in the preface to her work, Warren allows her femininity to shape her conception and expression of history. For Warren, a woman writing functioned as a teacher teaching.⁹ Her work is fraught with evidence to suggest that she

⁴ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980), Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in Early American Republic*, (University of Pennsylvania, 2008). Neither Norton nor Kerber spend much time discussing Warren but they agree that she was afforded unique privileges because of her status. All three historians state that in some ways, the concept of Republic Motherhood affected Warren's writing.

⁵ Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution Interspersed with Biographical, Political, and Moral Observations in Three Volume* edited by Lester H. Cohen (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988) iii.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., iv.

⁸ Mercy Otis Warren, *History*, iv.

⁹ Jeffrey Richards, *Mercy Otis Warren*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995) 127.

believed her role as a historian was to educate her readers on the finer points of morality and politics. She begins chapter one of *The History* with a description:

History, the deposite of crimes, and the record of every thing disgraceful or honorary to mankind, requires a just knowledge of character, to investigate the sources of action; a clear comprehension, to review the combination of causes; and precision of language, to detail the events that have produced the most remarkable revolutions.

To analyze the secret springs that have effected the progressive changes in society; to trace the origin of the various modes of government, the consequent improvements in science, in morality, or the national tincture that marks the manners of the people under despotic or moral liberal forms, is a bold and adventurous work.¹⁰

Warren's definition of history assumes moral categories and presupposes that the historian must be one who possesses a "just knowledge of character." The historian, Warren writes, must acknowledge that there are hidden springs within every human that produce action and give rise to the events of history. Although she does not explicitly delineate the historian's role in ameliorating those "secret springs" in this passage, the trajectory of her *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* reveals that Warren understood the historian functioning as a moral tutor. Warren stood out among her contemporaries as an historian who was acutely aware of her role as a public intellectual and she used her position to comment on larger moral, social, and political issues in post-Revolutionary America. Her history was not simply an expression of private feelings and sentiments, rather, "it [was] also a work of moral art: a self-consciously created instrument of ideology and ethics that simultaneously expressed the Revolutionaries' commitment to republicanism and served as a beacon shining back upon the exemplary forebears."¹¹ Warren's moral articulations underscored her understanding of the relationship between public discourse and the female author. Women in society were moralizing characters, advocating ethical behavior through their examples and writings.

Warren only mentions a few women in her work, but when she does, she closely identifies their femininity with courage and bravery. She discusses Lady Ackland, a British army wife, and recounts her story with the expressed intention of turning the reader's sympathy towards the American cause as well as depicting the resiliency of her sex. Lady Ackland, according to Warren's account, followed her husband into the wilderness of Canada during the campaigns of 1776 and was forced to endure horrendous conditions. Although Warren describes her as "a woman of the most delicate frame, of the genteelest manners, habituated to all the soft elegancies, and refined enjoyments, that attend high birth and fortune," Lady's Ackland's response to her appalling circumstances is what Warren uses to divulge Lady

¹⁰ Mercy Otis Warren, *History*, 1.

¹¹ Lester H. Cohen. "Explaining the Revolution: Ideology and Ethics in Mercy Otis Warren's Historical Theory," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (April 1980): 204.

[Ackland](#)'s true character.¹² After following her husband to Fort Ticonderoga, Lady Ackland set up camp close to the battlefield to wait out the skirmish. When she received word that her husband was badly wounded and was captured by American forces, she requested she be allowed to nurse Major Ackland until his end. Warren quotes British General Burgoyne's account of Lady Ackland's journey:

After so long an exposure and agitation of the spirits, exhausted not only for want of rest, but absolutely for want of food, drenched in rain to twelve hours together, that a woman should be capable of delivering herself to the enemy, probably in the night, and uncertain of what hands she should fall into, appeared an effort above human nature.¹³

Warren ultimately exalts the Americans for allowing a British woman to attend to her dying husband; nevertheless, she records her fellow woman's strength in the face of danger. She says that Lady Ackland's story presents an episode "so affecting to the mind of sensibility" that it justified a place in her historical record.¹⁴

Similarly, in recounting the siege of Charleston, Warren exalts the efforts of the city's women in providing a steady moral guide during a time of chaos. She states,

Even the ladies, in many instances, gave a glorious examples of female fortitude: They submitted patiently to inconveniences never before felt, to hardships they had never expected...With becoming dignity, they had secluded themselves from the gaieties of the city; and refused on all occasions to partake of any amusements in company with British officers; while with a charitable hand, they visited and soothed, whenever possible, the miserable victims crowded on board prison ships, and thrust in jail.¹⁵

She points to the women of Charleston as examples of patriotism at all costs, as Republicans who were willing to sacrifice their own interests for the good of the country. These women fulfilled their female duty to charity, but did so at the expense of the pleasures of the city. Even though they remained within the bounds of their womanly "dignity," the women of Charleston supported the war effort and exerted themselves for a political cause. Warren portrays them as models of Republic virtue and "female fortitude."¹⁶

Female Correspondence and the Polis

The women of Warren's circle wrote many letters to one another, their families, and, in Warren's case, political figures of the day. Their letters functioned as news-carriers,

¹² Mercy Otis Warren, *History*, 236.

¹³ General Burgoyne, quoted in Mercy Otis Warren's *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, 237.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 236.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 449.

¹⁶ Mercy Otis Warren, *History*, 449; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill, 1980). Kerber states that while women participated in political acts they did not re-locate their identity from the domestic to the political. She argues that most women did not display a political consciousness above their domestic concerns.

therapeutic outlets, and during the Revolution, “acts of collective patriotic resistance” to the “imperial war of the affections.”¹⁷ Warren and her close female friends did not shy away from expressing their deeply held political views to one another via letters. They wrote things they would never wish published, yet their epistolary correspondence emerged out of a profound sense of connection with posterity. Warren kept most of her letters and edited for spelling, grammar, and poor penmanship.¹⁸ She wrote with an eye to future generations that would read her letters as patriotic documents of the American founding.

Moreover, although letter writing may seem like an intensely private experience, the women of Warren’s circle—Abigail Adams, Hannah Winthrop, Janet Livingston Montgomery, Elizabeth Otis Brown, Dorothy Quincy Hancock, Sarah Gray Cary and others—were expressly aware of the semi-public function of their correspondence. Letters were often read aloud to husbands, children, neighbors, and other family members, especially when they arrived from someone who wrote with Warren’s political fervency. Hannah Winthrop, wife of prominent Harvard professor and mathematician John Winthrop, wrote to Warren in 1773 applauding her for the “noble patriotic spirit” of her letter that would certainly “warm the heart that has the least sensibilities, especially must it invigorate a mind possess’t of a like fellow feeling for this once happy country.”¹⁹ Winthrop is invariably referring to those in her personal sphere of family, friends, and neighbors to whom she would read, paraphrase, and allude to Warren’s letter. Warren’s letters were a semi-public forum used to develop her historical and political sensibility. It was here that she overtly stated her views of the relationship between gender and intellectualism.

In another letter to friend Hannah Winthrop in 1774, Warren says, When I took up my pen I determined to leave the field of politics to those whose proper business it is to speculate and to act at this important crisis; but the occurrences that have lately taken place are so alarming and the subject so interwoven with the enjoyments of social and domestic life as to command the attention of the mother and the wife who before the contest is decided may be called to weep over the names of her beloved sons, slain by the same sword that deprived of life their intrepid and heroic Father.²⁰

She refers to herself as a “wife and mother” and finds that the increasingly contentious atmosphere of the colonies affected her womanly circle of “social and domestic life.” In the same letter, Warren says she will make no apology to Hannah for “touching on a subject a little

Kate Davies, *Catherine McAulay and Mercy Otis Warren: The Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 217.

Jeffrey Richards, “Introduction” in *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), xi.

¹⁹ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, Jan . 4th, 1773 in *Warren-Adams Correspondence, Being Chiefly a Correspondence among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren, Vol. I. 1743-1777*. (Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 16.

²⁰ Warren to Winthrop, Plymouth 1774, *Warren: Selected Letters*, 10.

out of line of female attention” and expresses her indifference towards those who “think every rational pursuit lies beyond the reach of a sex too generally devoted to folly.”²¹ Although Warren locates her identity in the domestic duties of a colonial woman in the opening of the letter, she rejects the idea that political attentions are outside the sphere of female notice. Implicit within her statement is the belief that expressing political feeling is just as proper to women as it is to men.

Warren fiercely defended her claim to intellectual participation in the political concerns of the day. In a letter to Hannah Lincoln, she responds to the concerns of her friend regarding the political awareness displayed in Warren’s correspondence. Warren claims every “fond mother and affectionate wife” should be concerned with the coming war [not only](#) because she may be forced to watch her loved ones fight and die for the country but chiefly because she should be distressed that “the chains of thralldom should be forever fixed on the descendants of a race of worthies, who, to secure to them the rights nature, rivaled the much admired heroes of antiquity in the exercise of the illustrious virtues of fortitude, patience, and self denial.”²² Once again, Warren defines herself as a mother and wife; however, she draws Lincoln’s eyes beyond the home and elicits concern for future generations. Warren insinuates that women should be concerned with the political situation of their posterity. Warren’s letter to Lincoln reveals two women rationally discussing the pertinent and pressing issues of the day. This particular letter highlights the civic discourse occurring between the women of the Revolution as Warren addresses points of political disagreement between herself and Lincoln, who occupied the opposite end of the political spectrum. Warren urges her to consider the nature of man and right of liberty and remarks,

Contemplate the nature of man; consider them as originally on an equal footing, subject to the same feelings, stimulated by the same passions, endowed with the same heavenly spark to point them to what conduces most to the tranquility of society, and to the happiness of the individual, and then say, is it not astonishing, that by far the greater part of the species, in all ages of the world, should become the willing dupes of a few, who claim that indefeasible right to seize on the property and destroy the liberty and lives of their fellow men?²³

She calls upon her friend’s philosophical understanding of the world in order to establish common ground in a political argument. Her discussion of liberty and the nature of man parallels ideas found in the works of John Locke, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Hobbes. Warren’s letters display an impassioned, yet intellectual response to the Revolution and her correspondence with other similarly situated females reveals the unique atmosphere of the American Revolution: women engaged philosophically and intellectually with public concerns.

²¹ Warren to Winthrop, 28-29.

²² Mercy Otis Warren to Hannah Quincy Lincoln, Plymouth, September 3, 1774 in *Warren: Selected Letters*, 34.

²³ Warren to Lincoln, 35.

As events in America moved towards a breaking point, Warren sought the advice of well-respected and established British historian, Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay. In the mid-1770s, the two women began a long association in which themes of political and historical significance were major topics of conversation. In one letter written at the end of 1774, as the American colonies were moving towards armed conflict with Britain, Warren discusses the recent events from the perspective of the “faithful historian.” She states, “how Absurd will the plans of modern policy appear when the faithful Historian shall transmit to posterity the late Manoeuvres[sic] of a British Administration.”²⁴ Warren, who published several plays and pamphlets by 1774, was likely thinking of her own future when she refers to the faithful historian chronicling the events of the Revolution. Her correspondence with Macaulay served as space for Warren to cultivate her identity as an historian. Her subsequent letters read like news bulletins as she relates to Macaulay the swelling tide of revolutionary sentiment and escalating pace of events leading to war. Warren’s letters betray a keen mind, well aware of the maelstrom brewing around New England. The correspondence of these women disclosed Warren’s intimate knowledge of colonial politics as well as her connection with those closely involved in the secret details of the Revolution.

Warren’s complex literary style figures prominently in the correspondence between herself and Macaulay. In a letter from 1777 to Macaulay, Warren describes British General William Howe,

The name of Howe once revered in America is not held in general detestation for undertaking a project reproachful to human nature, and in derision for the manner of executing a plan that would reflect disgrace on the conductors, even if attended with success. But this hope must be at a distance from the British commander—if this country I ever conquered, the victors will only be masters of a depopulated soil—the thunder of their artillery may lay waste the cities but the spirit of the people in unconquerable the land may be deluged in blood and every village stained with the purple tide, but Death is preferred to thralldom by almost every individual, and dreadful indeed will be the conflict if the poingard [long dagger] is pushed by despair.²⁵

This passage is used in *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* when Warren first describes General Howe. In her history, she says the “name of Howe was at that time, at once revered, beloved, and dreaded in America” because the General “undertook the conquest of America; a project held reproachful, and which would have reflected dishonor on the perpetrators, even had it been crowned with success.”²⁶ Similar themes and words are employed; Warren depicts Howe as one who was once loved in the colonies but then loathed when he accepted a position in the British army. Furthermore, in

²⁴ Mercy Otis Warren to Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay, Plymouth N.E. December 29, 1774 in *Warren: Selected Letters*, 37.

²⁵ Warren to Macaulay, 85.

²⁶ Warren, *History*, Vol.I, 115.

both passages she describes the conquest of America as disgraceful and made a point of saying that its success would have meant shame on General Howe.

Warren relied on her correspondents to provide her with the information to furnish her historical writings with accuracy. In the preface to her history, she explains the nature of her sources to her audience:

Connected by nature, friendship, and every social tie, with many of the first patriots, and most influential characters on the continent; in the habits of confidential and epistolary intercourse with several gentlemen employed abroad in the most distinguished stations, and with others since elevated to the highest grades of rank and distinction, I had the best means of information.²⁷

One of those “gentlemen employed abroad” was none other than John Adams. In a letter penned to Adams in 1778, Warren reminded him that he was under contract to pass along observations “for the use of more than one lady on the western side of the Atlantic” and that she received assurance from Abigail at “the first safe conveyance some communication and remarks should be forwarded to Mrs. Warren.”²⁸

The information Warren received from friends and relatives and shared with Macaulay was eventually transcribed into her work. The note following a letter written by Warren to Macaulay in 1777 adds that several paragraphs from the letter were transcribed into her history. This annotation was added by her son, James Warren, who assisted in writing her history as well as bound several of her letters into a volume known as the *Letterbook*.²⁹ In effect, Warren formed historical theses within her letters to Macaulay. Their semi-public correspondence was, for Warren, a place to engage intellectually with historical and political ideas. The American Revolution afforded these women the opportunity to correspond across the Atlantic about the momentous events happening in the colonies. Their correspondence reveals the ways in which Warren and others in her female circle attempted to re-imagine and re-shape their civic identity as women in the new American republic.

Motherhood in the New Republic

Warren and her sphere of female correspondents were not the only early American citizens re-imagining the relationship between civic virtue and womanhood. Benjamin Rush, signatory of the Declaration of Independence, penned a famous essay on female education in which he proposed a new role for women in the fledgling American Republic. Along with writer Judith Sargent Murray, Rush pioneered the socio-political concept known as “Republican Motherhood.” In “Thoughts Upon the Female Education,” he argues that the education of females in the colonies before the Revolution was marked by British customs thus, in post-independence America, the educational system needed reform. Rush contends that women should be educated because of their indispensable role in the home. He says, “The equal share

²⁷ Warren, *History*, xli.

²⁸ Mercy Otis Warren to John Adams, Plymouth, December 16, 1778 in *Warren: Selected Letters*, 105.

²⁹ Warren to Macaulay, 95.

that every citizen has in the liberty, the possible share he may have in the government of our country, make it necessary that our ladies should be qualified to a certain degree by a peculiar and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government.”³⁰ According to Rush, the education of females lent itself, not only to the proper, republican education of the male members of society, but also to the greater happiness of society as a whole. Rush maintains that “the female temper can only be governed by reason, and that the cultivation of reason in women, is alike friendly to the order of nature, and to private as well as public happiness[sic].”³¹ Although the woman’s domain was the household, she played a political role in raising her children to be virtuous and patriotic American republicans.

Warren was an exemplary model of Republican Motherhood. Her letters to her sons encourage civic virtue and republican patriotism. She wrote to her eldest, James Warren, Jr. in 1773 about his time at Harvard University and said,

Think then my son, whither all your steps tend;--and let not the frequency of ill examples, the clamour of unruly passions, nor the persuasive arguments of evil tongues contaminate your morals...It is necessary to know something of the world—much of books, but much more of our own hearts to enter and tread safely the walk of life. Thy knowledge of the world teaches to shun the snares thrown out to the unwary and unsuspecting, and qualifies to become more amiable companions that if confined wholly to books. But the knowledge of ourselves my son is a science of higher importance;--this teaches to resist the impulse of appetite, to check the allies of passion, at the same time that it leads to certain permanent happiness and renders us useful to society.³²

Warren radiates the virtues described by Rush, that of civic duty, disinterested virtue, and moral steadfastness. In the post-Revolutionary era, women took a decidedly greater role in the rearing of their sons, especially in the area of political sensibility.³³ Warren was acutely aware this relationship when she wrote to her sons. In the letter quoted above, she encourages James, Jr. to deny his natural appetites in favor of reason so that he might be happy and, above all, “useful to society.”³⁴

³⁰ Benjamin Rush, “Thoughts Upon the Female Education, Accommodated to the Present States of Society, Manners, and Government, in the United States of America. Addressed to the Visitors of the Young Ladies’ Academy in Philadelphia, 28 July, 1787, At the Close of the Quarterly Examination, and Afterwards Published at the Request of the Visitors,” in *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical*, (Philadelphia: Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), 76-77.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

³² Mercy Otis Warren to James Warren, Jr. in *Warren: Selected Letters*, 18-19

³³ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), 248.

³⁴ Warren to James Warren, Jr., 19.

Women were called not only to instruct their sons in the ways of virtuous republicanism but also to model civic virtue to their progeny. Benjamin Rush proposes some ideal characteristics of a Republican woman in his essay. She was to be educated to read, write, and speak the English language well thus, to be literate. Secondly, women were to be instructed in bookkeeping and mathematics so they could assist their husbands in managing the business and financial concerns of the family. Third, women were to be educated in history, geography, basic chemistry, astronomy, natural philosophy, and Christianity.³⁵ This model of education assumes that a woman in society was to be well-rounded and rational. By modeling these virtues for [their](#) daughters and sons, women formed, and articulated political and intellectual positions for themselves.

Warren embraced the role of Republican mother as evidenced in her letters, poems, plays, and historical works. In one of her later plays, published in 1790, *The Ladies of Castile*, Warren tells the story of two women in the midst of a revolution in Spain, a clear reflection on revolutionary America. She used the experiences of her characters, Louisa, and Maria, to emphasize important virtues for the success of the American Republic. Louisa, a quiet, retiring character, appears in the first scene weeping over the state of Spain. She describes herself as a wandering waif “who seeks the meager comfort of a moss grown cave.”³⁶ Conversely, Maria enters the scene, rebukes Louisa for her womanly tears, and boldly talks of wielding justice’s sword. She proclaims she “has a bolder part to act” and she “scorn[s] to live upon ignoble terms—a supple courtier fawning at the feet of proud despotic nobles, or of kings.”³⁷ In the end, Louisa comes to a premature death and Maria is spirited off to safety in Portugal with her son by the valiant Don Haro. Spurred on and inspired by Maria’s courage and patriotic spirit, Don Haro vanquishes the despotic foe Don Velasco. Maria acts as a mother until the end of the play, but is not restricted by her role. Warren clearly indicates that the success of the republic lay on the shoulders of women who were willing to live zealously virtuous lives committed to freedom, political justice, and natural right. Maria, an archetype of Republican Motherhood, does not lose her identity as a woman and mother but rather adopts political, intellectual, and civic virtues as part of her role in the new Republic.

Republican motherhood represented a junction at which the domestic duties of an eighteenth-century wife and mother met the duties of an American citizen. Underlying the concept of Republican motherhood was the assumption that political formation happens at an early age and that the family was deeply influential in political culture.³⁸ Unlike their European equivalents, Americans explored the political connotations of a woman’s role in society.³⁹

³⁵ Rush, “Thoughts Upon the Female Education.”

³⁶ Mercy Otis Warren, “The Ladies of Castile” in *Poems Dramatic and Miscellaneous*, (Boston: I. Thomas and E.T. Andrews: 1790), http://books.google.com/books?id=oYAEAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (Accessed November 7, 2010), 117.

³⁷ [Warren](#), “Ladies,” 118.

³⁸ Linda Kerber, [Women](#), 282.

³⁹ Zagarri, [“Morals,”](#) 17.

Warren's historical writing provides further evidence of the political role that women were creating for themselves out of their domestic and other prescribed duties. Her work reveals a mind keenly aware of the problems facing the younger generation and real concern for the future of the Republic. *The History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution* functions as an extension of Warren's previously assumed role as a mother instructing her progeny. In a letter to son Winslow, she describes her role as a writer and historian "for the minds, to fix the principles [and] to correct the errors" of "the young members of society" and align their sense with virtue lest they walk down the road "crowded with swarms of useless votaries, who worship at the pedestal of pleasure or bow before the shrine of wealth."⁴⁰

Warren commences and concludes her historical project re-affirming her belief in the identity of a historian as a mother-teacher, nurturing readers in virtuous civic life. At the end of the introductory address to her history, Warren states,

Providence has clearly pointed out the duties of the present generation, particularly the paths which Americans ought to tread. The United States forms a young republic, a confederacy which ought ever to be cemented by a union of interest and affection, under the influence of those principles which obtained their independence. These have indeed, at certain periods, appeared to be in the wane; but let them never be eradicated, by the jarring interests of parties, jealousies of the sister states, or the ambition of individuals!⁴¹

Her concern was that the post-war generation would depart from Revolutionary values and build the nation around a value system akin to that of Europe. In her concluding remarks, she notes the rise of a party committed to the values of monarchy, the Federalists, and warns her audience that they must "maintain their well-earned fame, by a strict adherence to the principles of the revolution, and the practice of every public, social, and domestic virtue."⁴² She gives further advice to the next generation in her concluding statements saying,

If peace and unanimity are cherished, and the equalization of liberty, and the equity and energy of law, maintained by harmony and justice, the present representative government may stand for ages a luminous monument of republican wisdom, virtue, and integrity. The principles of the revolution ought ever to be the pole-star of the statesman, respected by the rising generations; and the advantages bestowed by Providence should never be lost, by negligence, indiscretion, or guilt.⁴³

⁴⁰ Mercy Otis Warren to Winslow Warren, Sept. 1785, quoted from Lester H. Cohen, "Explaining the Revolution: Ideology and Ethics in Mercy Otis Warren's Historical Theory," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 37, No. 2 (April, 1980): 204.

⁴¹ Warren, *History*, xliv.

⁴² Warren, *History*, 695.

⁴³ [Warren, *History*](#), 696.

In repeatedly referencing the principles of the Revolution, Warren is implicitly pointing back to her own account of the Revolution in which she strives to set out the ethics and core doctrines of the first American patriots. Similar to the aforementioned letter to her son James, Warren's history meant to spur her readers on to greater heights of virtue and political participation. She not only cultivated and expressed her own voice in the public square, but encouraged her readers to do the same by upholding civic virtues.

Mercy Otis Warren, a woman greatly admired among her friends and correspondents, devoted her life to the pursuit of the principles of the American Republic. Her *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, represents a monumental work in that she, the first female historian of significance in the United States, readily identifies and uses her femininity to further her historical project. To consider Mercy Otis Warren's life and prolific body of written work is to consider the position of a wife, mother, and woman in a time when new lines were drawn to express the relationship between the lady and the public square. The political discourse occurring within the informal bonds of female correspondence and the introduction of Republican motherhood points to a shifting conception of the role of the woman in political culture. Warren's public writing demonstrates the intersection between the domesticity of colonial womanhood and the republican polis of American citizenship. Mercy Otis Warren revealed, through her life and work, the unique posture of women at the time of the Revolution, a posture of forming, articulating, and engaging in political and intellectual discourse within various public and semi-public spheres.

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