

The Varieties of Political Experience: Women and the American
Revolution

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Introduction

Early in the spring of 1776, as tension between the American colonies and the British government was at its peak, there was a disturbance in the town of Stratford, Connecticut. One of the women had just given birth to a son and she had decided to name him Thomas Gage after the former commander of the British army. As news of the birth spread through the town, some of the patriotic townswomen became upset, and quickly decided to band together to punish the Loyalist mother.¹ Nearly 200 women “formed themselves into a battalion, and with solemn ceremony appointed a general and other officers to lead them on.” After forming their ranks, the women “then marched in the greatest good order to pay their compliments to Thomas Gage, and present his mother with a suit of tar and feathers.”² Only the pleas of the woman’s husband prevented this female militia from accomplishing their task.³ These New England women chose to take violent action, expressing their political identities in a public way. However, this overt political expression was not the only way that women expressed their political ideas during the American Revolution.

During the war for independence, patriot women expressed themselves politically on the homefront, as well as on the battlefield, in a variety of ways. At the beginning of the war, many women chose to spin their own cloth in order to support the politically and economically significant non-importation movement. As the war progressed and the economy worsened, some women chose to raise funds for the Continental Army, while others participated in bread riots against selfish merchants they derided as unworthy patriots, or even worse, political traitors.

¹ Benjamin H. Irvin, “Tar, Feathers, and the Enemies of American Liberties, 1768-1776,” *The New England Quarterly* 76, no.2 (June 2003), 224.

² Frank Moore, *Diary of the American Revolution* (New York, 1860), 219; in Irvin, “Tars, Feathers,” 223-224.

³ Elizabeth Cometti, “Women in the American Revolution,” *The New England Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (September 1947), 338.

Moreover, throughout the war, women wrote to each other, sharing their political ideas and identities with others. As these women wrote their political sentiments, galvanizing their commitment to the cause, other women directly involved themselves in the war effort by becoming camp followers and soldiers. By looking at communication networks, the homespun movement, fundraising efforts, and women involved in combat one can better understand the variety of women's political experiences and actions during the revolution.

While such a focus makes it plain that patriotic women expressed their political ideas through their writing and their actions during the American Revolution the way that historians have regarded women's political involvement in the revolution has not always been viewed as central or even significant. Some historians have focused on political expressions during the revolution but exclude women from their analysis. Other historians study the variety of female experiences during the war, but do not consider their political implications. Several other historians choose to research one woman's life in-depth, making politics part but not an important aspect of their lives. All these approaches have their strengths, however studying a broad swath of women and their experiences during the revolutionary era provides a better understanding of women and the important political roles they played in the revolution.

For the most part historians who choose to study political experiences and expressions during the American Revolution do not consider women in their analysis. These historians, such as Richard R. Beeman, study colonial and revolutionary politics in order to understand the relationship between citizens and their elected leaders, as well as understand the transition towards democracy and republicanism during the war. For example, Richard R. Beeman's book *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America*, studies the political world

that existed in different states and how it changed throughout the revolution.⁴ In his introduction, Beeman states “I will focus primarily on the relationship between citizens and political leaders in the realm of electoral politics.” Historians, such as Beeman, also look at political action out-of-doors to understand how citizens were able to sway the government through extralegal actions. “One strategy for uncovering the behavior of the many...[is] to observe those other public venues in which the business of politics was contested and negotiated.”⁵ Despite their claims to look at the varieties of political experiences in their research, historians do not include women who also expressed their political opinions during the war. By only looking at male political actions during the revolution, historians miss how the other half of the population contributed to the out-of-doors politics during the revolution, and thus shaped the history of this important moment in time.

Those historians who focus on women’s experiences during the revolution do not consider their political actions. Historians such as Mary Beth Norton and Carol Berkin conducted research with the goal of understanding the lives of women and how they were shaped by the revolution, since women had previously been ignored in historical research.⁶ These historians, while attempting to fill a gap in the historical research, were more concerned with revolutionary women’s experiences and did not consider that women might have had political opinions during the revolutionary period or acted in significant political ways.⁷ While some historians acknowledge that women were politically involved in the boycott movement, for example, they claim that “women showed little interest in preserving the public platforms...the challenges of

⁴ Richard R. Beeman, *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1.

⁵ Beeman, *Varieties*, 4.

⁶ Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1980), xiii.

⁷ Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, xiv.

the [boycotts] had been met only to preserve the survival of the ordinary [way of life].”⁸ By only looking at women’s experiences on the homefront during the revolution, historians were unable to see that women repeatedly involved themselves in revolutionary politics beyond just simply supporting the boycotts at the beginning of the war.

Within the past five years, historians have shifted their research to focus on one specific woman in history, mostly from the elite class, analyzing various aspects of the woman’s life, including their political actions and ideas. Many modern historians, such as Owen S. Ireland and Rosemarie Zagarri, when focusing on individual women, look at their gender, social standing, and religion and then analyze how those identities affected the woman’s domestic and political experiences.⁹ In this way, historians are able to look at the private and domestic sphere that women occupied, their more public and political participation in society, and instances where the line between public and private may be blurred. However, one weakness with looking at only one woman is it may be difficult for the historian to expand their argument out to a broader population, especially if they are studying an elite woman. As Owen S. Ireland put it, “Rather, she [Esther Deberdt Reed] understood politics as part of the process whereby she and Joseph [her husband] collaborated to marshal the resources they needed...”¹⁰ Esther Deberdt Reed is an important woman to study because of her political writings and the organizations that she ran. However, it is difficult for historians to generalize any conclusions, or consider the variety of wartime experiences, solely based on the life and actions of only one woman.

⁸ Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), xvii.

⁹ Owen S. Ireland, *Sentiments of a British-American Woman: Esther Deberdt Reed and the American Revolution* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 3.

¹⁰ Ireland, *Esther Deberdt Reed*, 3.

Historians take different approaches in their analysis of women's political actions during the revolution. Some historians choose to focus on the political culture in America and how it changed during the war, but do not consider what role women might have had in helping to shape this shift. There are other historians that do focus on women's experiences during the revolution. However, these historians rarely acknowledge that women were actively involved in out-of-doors revolutionary politics beyond simply supporting the boycott of British goods. Other historians chose to look at individual women's lives, however whatever conclusions they can draw from their research cannot be applied to a broader population of women. To bridge some of these gaps in the historical research, my research focuses on women's political experiences and subsequent expressions of their political ideas during the revolution. By looking at women from different social standings and geographical locations, we can see more variety in their experiences and backgrounds, making any commonalities between them more significant and able to be applied to a larger population. Researching these patriotic women allows us to better understand the significant political contributions that women made to the revolutionary effort.

Chapter 1: Communication Networks

Abigail Adams sat down in Braintree, Massachusetts on March 31, 1776 to write a letter to her husband expressing her hopes for the Continental Congress. “I long to hear that you have declared an independency” she opined, “and by the way in the new Code of Laws.” In this transformative moment, she desired that her husband and other men at the Congress “would Remember the Ladies.” Playfully, yet reasonably and no doubt truthfully, she chided, “If [particular] care and attention is not paid to the [Ladies] we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.”¹¹ About three months later, independence was officially declared, however the Continental Congress had done little for the women of the various states.¹² This overt political expression by Abigail Adams was not the first time that women expressed their political ideas surrounding the independence movement.

Both in the years leading up to and during the American Revolution women actively participated in the political realm. The implementation of royal policies targeted at the colony to quell any potential rebellion altered colonial society and caused women to speak out and act against perceived British tyranny. After independence had been declared, women continued to use communication networks to discuss the war and other political issues, as well as further their personal political interests. By looking at the political acts and ideas of women such as Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Hannah Winthrop, Esther Deberdt Reed, and Phillis Wheatley, one can better understand the important role that women played in the revolution.

¹¹ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March - 5 April 1776 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

¹² Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown & Company Limited, 1980), xv.

Before we can look at the contributions that these women made to the revolutionary effort, one must first understand the political environment that existed in colonial America for women. During the colonial period, women involved themselves in local politics. In 1733, some of the women who had been working as merchants in New York submitted a complaint to their local newspaper. The petition began with, “we the widows of this city, protest the failure to invite us to court.” The women further defended their political aspirations by writing “we are housekeepers, pay our taxes, carry on trade and most of us are she Merchants, and as we in some measure contribute to the Support of Government, we ought to be Intitled to some of the Sweets of it.”¹³ Even during the colonial period, women were overtly involved in politics, and were arguing for more formal roles.

While unable to gain formal political say, colonial women were able to exert political power through religious institutions. Women often outnumbered men in a congregation meaning they could control who their congregational minister would be. The Great Awakening, which spread through the colonies from the 1720s through the 1750s, even allowed some women to become preachers.¹⁴ One such woman, was Sarah Osborn in Newport, Rhode Island who led religious meetings out of her house at the same time that colonists were protesting against the Townshend Duties. Osborn preached to almost 500 people every night except for Saturday, with the crowd comprised of people of different gender, race, and age.¹⁵ As Osborn grew older, and her health failed, she worked with a group of women to find someone to take over her religious role. Sarah Osborn worked with other women to ensure that Samuel Hopkins was appointed as

¹³ *New-York Weekly Journal*, January 21, 1734; in Jean P. Jordan, “Women Merchants in Colonial New York,” *New York History* 58, no. 4 (October 1977): 412.

¹⁴ Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 134.

¹⁵ Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 135.

the new pastor for Newport's First Congregational Church.¹⁶ Ezra Stiles, a fellow minister, wrote that "the Sorority of her [Osborns's] Meeting" was "violently engaged" in getting Hopkins appointed, and that they were ultimately successful in their goal.¹⁷ Samuel Hopkins' appointment may have been difficult had it not been for the support of Osborn and the other women, because Hopkins was an abolitionist. Some of the colonists in the First Congregational Church were slave owners and slave traders, but the women, who made up two-thirds of the church, chose to support him. Even when Hopkins gave antislavery sermons, the continued support from the women in the congregation allowed him to keep his position.¹⁸ Even before the revolution, women were involved in local political matters, often acting as a group in order to accomplish their goals.

With taxation acts being imposed on the colonies, women worked alongside men to protest these new acts and ensure economic repercussions for Britain. With the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, England began the process of paying back their war debts. Secretary of the Exchequer, modernly titled Prime Minister, George Grenville argued that taxes should be levied in the colonies to help pay for colonial defense against the French.¹⁹ The Stamp Act was one of the early taxation acts passed by Parliament in 1765, placing duties on any paper products. In response, colonists in various locations met and signed non-importation agreements in the hopes that boycotting the taxed products would place pressure on British merchants, who would then pressure Parliament to alter their policies.²⁰ The non-importation agreements clearly stated, "we

¹⁶ Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 136.

¹⁷ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 137, note 82.

¹⁸ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 137.

¹⁹ Philip Lawson, "George Grenville and America: The Years of Opposition, 1765 to 1770," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (October 1980): 561.

²⁰ Terrence H. Witkowski, "Colonial Consumers in Revolt: Buyer Values and Behavior during the Nonimportation Movement, 1764-1776," *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 2 (September 1989): 220.

will not, from and after January 1, 1769, import into the province any tea, paper, glass, or painters' colours, until the Acts imposing duties on these articles have been repealed."²¹ Women even signed their own non-importation agreements. Five female shopkeepers in Philadelphia signed a non-importation agreement, using their role as property owners and members of the mercantile community to take political action.²² Newspapers helped in spreading news about the boycotts and encouraged others to join their efforts. Women, especially, were targeted by these messages since they were the consumers for a household and without their support the boycotts would not be effective in their goal. One article, published in *The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, was written directly and patronizingly to women calling for them to "love your country much better than fine things" by wearing homespun, drinking locally produced tea, and avoiding any imported British goods.²³ For all of the gendered language and assumptions regarding "finer things," the article nonetheless demonstrates a clear recognition of women's consumer power. In sum, women's participation assured the success or failure of political resistance. In the end, women shaped the consumer response and the economic pressure of the boycotts succeeded in causing Parliament to repeal some of the acts, however with each repeal Parliament ensured that they reaffirmed that they had the authority to raise taxes in the colonies.²⁴

While the men largely reacted against the inability to participate in the political process, the women were reacting against a British invasion into their homes and communities. Unlike

²¹ "Boston Non-Importation Agreement, August 1768," Yale Law School, last modified 2008, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/boston_non_importation_1768.asp.

²² Sheila L. Skemp, "Women and Politics in the Era of the American Revolution," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, 5.

²³ "Address to the ladies," *Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, November 16, 1767. In "Address to the Ladies," Massachusetts Historical Society, https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?pid=2&old=1&mode=nav&ft=Coming%20of%20the%20American%20Revolution&item_id=413.

²⁴ Lawson, "Grenville and America," 561.

men, who only acted outside of the political structure for extreme cases, women knew how to effectively achieve political means removed from a town meeting or General Court. Before the revolution women cultivated close-knit and extensive communication networks in order to stay in touch with relatives and friends or to ask for help with personal or family matters. Once the war began, they used those established social networks in order to share political ideas and support the revolution. Women, such as Hannah Winthrop, Mercy Otis Warren, Abigail Adams, Esther Deberdt Reed, and Phillis Wheatley were politically active during this time to support the revolution, both physically and ideologically, on the home front as well as the battlefield.

Hannah Winthrop wrote extensively about the revolution and even directly experienced the destruction the war brought. While her exact birthdate is unknown, Hannah Fayerweather was baptized February 12, 1727 at the First Church of Boston. She was married at nineteen to Parr Tolman, however Tolman passed away only a couple of years later. Hannah Fayerweather married her second husband, John Winthrop in 1756. John Winthrop was a direct descendant of the founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The couple lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts since John Winthrop was a professor of math and natural philosophy at Harvard College.²⁵ She maintained regular communications with Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Adams. Hannah Winthrop was an eyewitness to the events that occurred in Lexington on April 19, 1775. She wrote a description of the events to Mercy Otis Warren, focusing on the “frightened women and children: some in carts with their tattered furniture, others on foot fleeing into the woods.”²⁶ In her letters Hannah Winthrop carried out a political dialogue with other women by sharing her

²⁵ “Correspondence of Mercy Otis Warren and Hannah Winthrop,” Massachusetts Historical Society, accessed November 25, 2019, <https://www.masshist.org/features/warren-winthrop/sketches>.

²⁶ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, c. 1775, microfilm, in *Winthrop, Hannah F. (d. 1790). Correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, 1752-1789 [bulk dates 1752-1782]* (Washington Crossing, PA: David Library of the American Revolution).

own ideas, asking for more information, or asking for the opinions of the woman she was writing to. In one such letter to Mercy Otis Warren, Hannah admits “when I write to my Friend who is so well [versed] in Politics, I cant forbear chatting with her a little on the subject, by way of acquiring knowledge.”²⁷ This communication network helped foster the spread of information, experiences, and ideas across larger geographical areas, thus politicizing a larger spectrum of the American population.

Like Hannah Winthrop, Mercy Otis Warren was born into a politically ambitious family on September 14, 1728 in Barnstable, Massachusetts. Her father, James, was involved in local politics, however he lacked a formal education. To ensure that his kids had better opportunities, he hired his brother to tutor his son, James Jr. Both her father and her uncle allowed Mercy Otis to sit in on her brother’s lessons as he prepared for Harvard College.²⁸ Mercy’s brother was also a radical patriot, responsible for coining the phrase “taxation without representation is tyranny” in one of his pamphlets.²⁹ Mercy Otis married James Warren, a family friend and business ally, on November 14, 1754.³⁰ Yet, Mercy, like many elite women, actively took part in the political dialogue of the day. Warren, for example, wrote and published several satirical plays criticizing the royal government of Massachusetts, with Governor John Hutchinson being the target for much of her criticism. Her writing gained attention from many patriots, with John Adams even requesting that she write a Grecian-inspired play or poem to celebrate the Boston Tea Party.³¹ Moreover, Warren established an extensive social network through her publications as well as

²⁷ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, April 2, 1776, microfilm, in *Winthrop, Hannah F. (d. 1790). Correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, 1752-1789 [bulk dates 1752-1782]* (Washington Crossing, PA: David Library of the American Revolution).

²⁸ Cheryl Z. Oreovicz, “Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814),” *Legacy* 13, no. 1 (1996): 56.

²⁹ Martha J. King, “The “pen of the historian”: Mercy Otis Warren’s History of the American Revolution,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 72, no. 2 (Winter 2011): 514.

³⁰ Oreovicz, “Mercy Otis Warren,” 56.

³¹ King, “Warren’s History of the American Revolution,” 515.

her husband's political positions. When James Warren became a member of the Committee of Correspondence, the Warren house became a meeting place for the group, with Mercy acting as the hostess.³² By playing hostess to such an important group, not only did Warren gain valuable information about the patriotic cause, but she would also relay this information to others. Like Hannah Winthrop, Mercy Otis Warren used letters to gain information and share her political experiences and ideas and she used these letters and her publications to inform a larger public audience of revolutionary and republican ideals.

Similarly, Abigail Adams took on a lot of responsibilities during the revolution. Abigail Smith was born November 11, 1744 to parents, Elizabeth Quincy Smith and Reverend William Smith.³³ Abigail Smith came from a gentrified family, and received a 'proper' female education, unlike what Mercy Otis Warren learned through her brother's tutelage.³⁴ On October 25, 1764 Abigail Smith married John Adams, a lawyer from a middling yeoman family. John Adams had inherited his father's farmland a couple years prior, and the couple moved there after they were married.³⁵ However, John Adams quickly became an important figure for the revolutionary movement and would often be away from home. In his absence, Abigail Adams ran the family farm, handled the family's finances, and maintained communication with other political figures, both male and female, to share ideas and gain information.³⁶ Abigail Adams split her political attention between the local and national level. Abigail Adams wrote with women like Mercy Otis Warren and Hannah Winthrop to share their personal experiences during the revolution, how it affected them, and raised each other's spirits through shared political fervor. With her husband

³² King, "Warren's History of the American Revolution," 514.

³³ Phyllis Lee Levin, *Abigail Adams: A Biography* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2001), 3.

³⁴ Levin, *Abigail Adams*, 4-5.

³⁵ Levin, *Abigail Adams*, 12.

³⁶ Edith B. Gelles, "Abigail Adams: Domesticity and the American Revolution," *The New England Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (December 1979): 500.

being involved in the Continental Congress and the Sons of Liberty, Abigail Adams became involved in more national political conversations of liberty and independence, as well as considering what that might look like for women.

Esther Deberdt Reed grew up in a mercantile family and was taught how to effectively communicate with those she worked with. Reed was born in London, England in October 1746. When she was seventeen, Esther Deberdt met Joseph Reed. At first, Esther's father disapproved of Joseph Reed, so Esther wrote letters back and forth to Joseph for five years. Eventually, the couple married in the spring of 1770. While they had planned to live in England, family circumstances forced Esther and Joseph Reed to move to America, specifically Philadelphia, later in 1770. Esther's father had taught her about patron/client politics when she lived back in England, and Esther Reed applied those lessons to political campaigns, both her own and her husband's, in Philadelphia.³⁷ Despite being raised in England, Esther chose to support the Patriots, and in the summer of 1780, Reed organized a fundraising campaign with the help of the Philadelphia Ladies Association, where female volunteers would systematically go around Philadelphia collecting donations for the Continental Army. Before the campaign, Esther Reed published a broadside that called for donations on a Saturday, ensuring that the women of the Ladies Association could talk about their campaign in church the following day.³⁸ Esther Deberdt Reed consistently drew upon her social connections in order to further her patriotic, political agenda.

Phillis Wheatley was enslaved, but her owners chose to support her poetry, which allowed Wheatley's poems to be shared across a broad audience. Phillis Wheatley was about

³⁷ Owen S. Ireland, *Sentiments of a British-American Woman: Esther Deberdt Reed and the American Revolution* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 2.

³⁸ Ireland, *Esther Deberdt Reed*, 182.

seven years old when she arrived in Boston in 1761. Purchased by John Wheatley, a tailor, and his wife Susanna, Phillis was taught to read by their daughter Mary Wheatley. While she initially wrote religious poetry, Phillis Wheatley soon began to write poems about the political situation in Boston.³⁹ She wrote one poem after a British customs officer killed a teenager in 1768. The teenager was part of a crowd protesting British soldiers occupying the city of Boston.⁴⁰ In the poem, Wheatley wrote “In heaven’s eternal court it was decreed/ How the first martyr for the cause should bleed/ To clear the country of the hated brood/ We whet his courage for the common good.”⁴¹ John and Susanna Wheatley shipped some of Phillis’s poems to London to be published in 1773, and even sent Phillis over to London to see her poems published. The Wheatleys’ also put Phillis in contact with the countess of Huntingdon, who became another patron for her.⁴² Phillis Wheatley, while unable to build her own communication network, was granted access to her owners’ communication network, which allowed her poetry and political message to be shared with an international audience.

All five women established extensive communication networks, and, for the elite women, their husbands were all involved in the independence movement. However, these women were participating as political beings separate from their husbands. While none of the women could vote or hold political offices, they acted in political ways outside of the conventional political structure in order to support the revolution. Adams, Warren, Winthrop, Wheatley, and Reed were all aware of political happenings and were able to make intelligent decisions about the course of action that would be best suited for the situation. For example, Esther Reed referenced the earlier

³⁹ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 137-138.

⁴⁰ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 138.

⁴¹ Vincent Carretta, ed., *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001); in Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 138.

⁴² Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 139.

boycotts in her broadside, therefore connecting and relating her fundraising campaign to earlier patriotic efforts made by women. “The time is arrived to display the same sentiments which animated us at the beginning of the Revolution, when we renounced the use of teas.”⁴³ These decisions, and the political arguments behind them, were dispersed through letters and publications so that others might join in, making the political actions more effective. Mercy Otis Warren was sent some of Phillis Wheatley’s poems by Sarah Walter Hesilrige. In her response, Warren tells Hesilrige, “But I am not less surprised at the native genius and flowing numbers of the gentle African.”⁴⁴ Elite women such as Warren, Adams, Winthrop, and Reed all established communication networks that they used to share their ideas and experiences, which included political discussions during the revolution. Wheatley, and Reed as well, relied on, and had to navigate, a system of patronage and favors in order to spread their political messages. Only a few weeks after the beginning of the donation drive, Esther Deberdt Reed held a christening ceremony for her son, inviting key political guests. While Esther had named her other kids after relatives, she chose to name this son “George Washington,” which was a political act meant to not only show the Reed’s support for the revolution, but also to tie themselves to the Washington’s. To show reciprocity, Martha Washington stayed at the Reed’s house in Philadelphia to help with and attend the christening ceremony. Esther Reed also invited a man from the French embassy, the president of the Continental Congress, and a member of the Constitutionalist Party.⁴⁵ Esther Reed was purposefully inviting people who represented

⁴³ Esther Deberdt Reed, *The Sentiments of an American Woman* (Philadelphia: John Dunlop, 1780).

⁴⁴ "To Sarah Walter Hesilrige, [c. December 1773 or March 1774]." In *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, edited by Richards Jeffrey H. and Harris Sharon M., 20-22. University of Georgia Press, 2009. Accessed May 2, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46ndwc.14.

⁴⁵ Ireland, *Esther Deberdt Reed*, 180-181.

America and its allies, proving she was politically savvy to make a symbolic statement while also increasing her family's political standings.

Women used and adapted these communication networks for whatever purpose they found necessary at the time. Sometimes women would attach relevant speeches they thought the recipient might find interesting or useful. Hannah Winthrop's husband sent Mercy Otis Warren a speech, using his wife as a conduit to do so. "He [John Winthrop] begs your acceptance of Coll Hancocks Animated Oration which He is sure you will read with pleasure."⁴⁶ Other times, the women would request information from each other. In a letter to Mercy Otis Warren, Hannah Winthrop noted that John Adams' "absence from [Congress] gives me pain. Do tell me the reason."⁴⁷ Women used these communication networks to share information amongst themselves, either for strategic, personal, or political reasons. These correspondences also were used to develop political arguments and solutions for problems the women faced. Only a few days after independence was declared from Britain, Hannah Winthrop wrote to Mercy Otis Warren, "as to Political matters.... indulge me with Laying our Political heads together."⁴⁸ The communication networks that the women established and utilized during the revolution allowed information to be shared among the women as well as served a private forum for women to craft and share their political ideas.

⁴⁶ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, April 1, 1774, microfilm, in *Winthrop, Hannah F. (d. 1790). Correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, 1752-1789 [bulk dates 1752-1782]* (Washington Crossing, PA: David Library of the American Revolution).

⁴⁷ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, January 29, 1776, microfilm, in *Winthrop, Hannah F. (d. 1790). Correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, 1752-1789 [bulk dates 1752-1782]* (Washington Crossing, PA: David Library of the American Revolution).

⁴⁸ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, July 8, 1776, microfilm, in *Winthrop, Hannah F. (d. 1790). Correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, 1752-1789 [bulk dates 1752-1782]* (Washington Crossing, PA: David Library of the American Revolution).

Women, such as Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, Esther Deberdt Reed, Phillis Wheatley, and Hannah Winthrop, made political declarations to each other to share ideas, ask for more information, and even condone the actions of others. Hannah Winthrop said it best in a letter to Mercy Otis Warren, “and be it known unto Britain, even American daughters are Politicians & Patriots and will aid the good work with their Female Efforts.”⁴⁹ Hannah Winthrop recognized women as political beings who were capable of contributing to the revolution to help gain independence. Mercy Otis Warren wrote a letter to Abigail Adams on August 26, 1775 to inform Mrs. Adams of some events that would affect her husband. “I Return a Sermon Mr. Adams favoured me with. Tell him (but strictly Confidential and secret) that before he sets out I believe he will yet hear the Musick of War and the Loud Blasts of Distruction that will probably make Miserable the fond Wife and the affectionate Mother. Tis my opinion He will have some important Inteligence to Carry to Philadelphia if He stays at Braintree forty eight hours Longer.”⁵⁰ Mercy Otis Warren used her communication network to gain information that would affect her friends, and then was able to pass the information along in a timely manner.

These letters and poems demonstrate that women were actively participating in the political realm. The shared communication network allowed for ideas and information to be spread among other women and Americans in general. The political actions of women increased the morale of male politicians and soldiers making it easier to continue fighting for independence. However, the political aspirations that women expressed during the revolution did not disappear after gaining independence from Britain. After the revolution women were given

⁴⁹ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, c. 1774, microfilm, in *Winthrop, Hannah F. (d. 1790). Correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, 1752-1789 [bulk dates 1752-1782]* (Washington Crossing, PA: David Library of the American Revolution).

⁵⁰ Mercy Otis Warren to Abigail Adams, August 26, 1775, in *Adams Papers* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society), <http://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/ADMS-04-01-02-0177>.

the political role of 'republican mother' as an acknowledgement of what they did to assist the revolution.

Chapter 2: Homespun and Funds

“On the commencement of actual war, the Women of America manifested a firm resolution to contribute...to the deliverance of their country,” began the anonymous broadside that circulated throughout Philadelphia on June 10, 1780. The author, “An American Woman” continued, by asking other American women- “who, amongst us, will not renounce with the highest pleasure, those vain ornaments, when she shall consider that the valiant defenders of America will be able to draw some advantage from the money.”⁵¹ This broadside was the first part of a campaign, organized by Esther Deberdt Reed, to canvas Philadelphia, collecting monetary donations to send to the Continental army. Over the course of three weeks, the Ladies Association collected over \$300,000 in paper money.⁵² However, this campaign was not the only “offering of the Ladies,” but rather it was one of the many ways that women made political choices within their domestic spheres to support the revolution.⁵³ Political actions such as spinning bees, wearing homespun, and raising money for the American army politicized the involved women and the domestic sphere. By looking into these political acts, one can better understand and appreciate the political actions that women took to support the revolution.

While women during the revolution were unable to hold political office, this did not prevent them from becoming involved in politics. Barred from political office, women participated in “out of doors” politics, meaning they discussed and demonstrated their political beliefs outside the halls of traditional political power, and through that were able to sway,

⁵¹ Esther Deberdt Reed, *The Sentiments of an American Woman* (Philadelphia: John Dunlop, 1780).

⁵² Owen S. Ireland, *Sentiments of a British-American Woman: Esther Deberdt Reed and the American Revolution* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 183.

⁵³ Reed, *Sentiments of an American Woman*.

support, or make their opinions visible to the larger public and more formal political bodies.⁵⁴

Women were political beings and they exercised their political opinions by participating in boycotts, supporting nonimportation agreements, holding spinning bees, wearing homespun, and organizing fundraisers for the Continental army. By participating, or refusing to participate in these political actions, women expressed their political identity and participated in a vibrant political culture.⁵⁵

Women's participation in the boycott of British goods in the 1760s and 1770s demonstrates this point. After the nonimportation agreements, colonists began to consider certain goods, such as tea and cloth, as representations of English luxury and tyranny. Boycotting such goods gave new political significance to the women who participated in them as well as to alternative, locally produced products created to replace British goods.⁵⁶ With the boycott of British cloth, colonists had to produce alternatives and women stepped into public roles in order to fulfill this economic need. Women not only expressed their political identity, but they also helped create a new political identity for Americans, separate and in opposition to Britain, as seen in their efforts to support the homespun movement.⁵⁷ Once the revolution began, the cloth being produced became a symbol of political support for independence, and republican political ideas of virtue and simplicity. The revolution politicized the domestic sphere, and some colonial women made the political choice to support the war, crafting and reinforcing their political identities as "daughters of liberty."

⁵⁴ Benjamin H. Irvin, *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty: The Continental Congress and the People Out of Doors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

⁵⁵ Irvin, *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty*, 15.

⁵⁶ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 177.

⁵⁷ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 73.

With the introduction of the Stamp Act in 1765 and the Townshend Acts in 1767, colonists signed nonimportation agreements in the hopes that economic pressure would lead Parliament to repeal the acts. With the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, England began the process of paying back their war debts. Secretary of the Exchequer, modernly titled Prime Minister, George Grenville argued that taxes should be levied in the colonies to help pay for colonial defense against the French.⁵⁸ Charles Townshend was a high ranking member of Parliament and was given the title of Chancellor of the Exchequer, meaning he was the head of the British treasury.⁵⁹ Both men advocated for acts that asserted Parliament's authority to raise taxes in the colonies, as the men saw the colonies as dominions of the metropole.

In response, colonists met and signed a non-importation agreement in the hopes that boycotting the taxed products would place pressure on British merchants, who would then pressure Parliament to alter their policies.⁶⁰ Colonies with large merchant cities, such as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York especially, used their status to their advantage for these boycotts. News of the boycotts were shared through newspapers, with some newspapers even including articles directed towards women to encourage them not to consume unpatriotic items. Women at the time were the primary consumers for a household and if they chose to continue to purchase British goods, the boycotts would not have been effective. One article, published in *The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, called for women to "love your country much better than fine things" by wearing homespun, drinking locally produced tea, and avoiding any

⁵⁸ Philip Lawson, "George Grenville and America: The Years of Opposition, 1765 to 1770," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (October 1980): 561.

⁵⁹ Robert D. Harlan, "David Hall and the Townshend Acts," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 68, no. 1 (1974): 24.

⁶⁰ Terrence H. Witkowski, "Colonial Consumers in Revolt: Buyer Values and Behavior during the Nonimportation Movement, 1764-1776," *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 2 (September 1989): 220.

imported British goods.⁶¹ Despite the fact that the article is patronizing towards women, it nonetheless demonstrates that men realized that in order for the boycotts to be successful, they would need the support of the ladies. Women chose to support the boycotts and ensured the success of early political resistance against British tyranny.

Women not only chose to support nonimportation, but they also created and signed their own nonimportation agreements. The non-importation agreements written by men in the various colonies generally stated, “we will not, from and after January 1, 1769, import into the province any tea, paper, glass, or painters’ colours, until the Acts imposing duties on these articles have been repealed.”⁶² After the Coercive Acts in 1774, the First Continental Congress adopted a general nonimportation agreement throughout the colonies.⁶³ That same month, on October 25, 1774, fifty-one women from Edenton, North Carolina gathered for a meeting of the Edenton Ladies’ Patriotic Guild. The meeting was called to discuss the nonimportation agreement from the Continental Congress, and specifically how it related to tea. Once the meeting was called to order, each woman at the meeting was offered a choice between two kinds of tea. The first, was imported from England, while the second variety was a locally sourced tea made by the ladies in the Guild. After all the women in attendance chose the homemade tea, they then signed pre-prepared resolution stating their intentions to support the nonimportation agreement.⁶⁴ “As we cannot be indifferent on any occasion that appears to affect the peace and happiness of our country, and has been thought necessary for the public good,” the women agreed to “enter into

⁶¹ “Address to the ladies,” *Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, November 16, 1767. In “Address to the Ladies,” Massachusetts Historical Society, https://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?pid=2&old=1&mode=nav&ft=Coming%20of%20the%20American%20Revolution&item_id=413.

⁶² “Boston Non-Importation Agreement, August 1768,” Yale Law School, last modified 2008, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/boston_non_importation_1768.asp.

⁶³ Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 81.

⁶⁴ Inez Parker Cumming, “The Edenton Ladies’ Tea-Party,” *The Georgia Review* 8, no. 4 (1954): 389.

several particular resolves...to do everything as far as lies within our power to testify our adherence.” The women ended the resolution by stating that the resolution and their signatures serve “as a witness to our fixed intention and solemn determination to [support nonimportation].”⁶⁵ In this instance, the Edenton Ladies’ Patriotic Guild were explicitly stating their political identity as patriots, but also declaring that their participation in nonimportation was being done for the greater good of their country and the people within it.

Cloth, like tea, also became politicized through the nonimportation agreements. Revolutionaries especially targeted silk and lace as symbols of luxury and status, specifically in the context of British imperial oppression and English extravagance.⁶⁶ John Adams, in a letter to James Warren, wrote that “Silks and Velvets and Lace must be dispensed with [as] Trifles in a Contest for Liberty.”⁶⁷ Men especially admonished women for their desire to wear lace and silk. Sally Franklin Bache wrote her father, Benjamin Franklin, asking for him to send her lace and feathers for her to wear to various social events in Philadelphia celebrating the end of British occupation of the city.⁶⁸ In response, Benjamin Franklin reprimanded her for asking for such frivolous items, writing that the request “disgusted me as much as if you had put salt in my strawberries.” He goes on to write that “I cannot in conscience or in decency encourage...by my example, in furnishing my children with foolish modes and luxuries.” Franklin closed the letter with comforting words, “If you wear your cambric ruffles as I do...they will come in time to be

⁶⁵ “Edenton, North Carolina, Oct. 25, 1774,” *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 16 January 1775; in Cumming, “The Edenton Ladies’ Tea Party,” 391.

⁶⁶ Ben Marsh, “The Republic’s New Clothes: Making Silk in the Antebellum United States,” *Agricultural History* 86, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 208.

⁶⁷ John Adams to James Warren, Oct. 20, 1775, “Founding Families: Digital Editions of the Papers of the Winthrops and the Adamases,” Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/ff/> (accessed Jan. 5, 2011) in Marsh, “Republic’s New Clothes,” 208-209.

⁶⁸ Zara Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk: Hidden Histories of the British Atlantic World* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2016), 308.

lace.”⁶⁹ With the nonimportation agreements limiting the supply of cloth coming into the colonies, combined with the dislike of luxurious cloth, the colonists had to create their own cloth for practical and political reasons.

One of the more visible ways that women created their own cloth was through spinning bees. Spinning bees allowed women to express their political loyalties in a visible way during the period of nonimportation agreements. From March 1768 through October 1770 New England newspapers recorded over sixty instances of spinning bees where women gathered to spin yarn and cloth.⁷⁰ The spinning bees were highly valued by colonists as an important symbol during the nonimportation agreements and Townshend Acts. A Philadelphian broadside in 1767, signed by city merchants, warned that if the Townshend Acts were not lifted, that America would begin to manufacture for itself.⁷¹ Spinning was one way that America could begin to manufacture for itself, or at least provision the colonists until Britain repealed the odious Townshend Acts. Spinning was a strictly female task, but because it held such political significance, it received a lot of attention, with one newspaper claiming that these women “determined the Condition of Men, by means of their Spinning Wheels: And Virgil intimates, that the Golden Age advanced slower, or faster, as they spun.”⁷²

Spinning bees could take a variety of forms. Women would sometimes hold spinning matches where a small number of women competed to see who could spin the greatest amount of yarn. During spinning demonstrations women occupied a public space, such as the town square, and spun, often attracting large numbers of spectators. The majority of spinning bees were

⁶⁹ “From Benjamin Franklin to Sarah Bache, 3 June 1779,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-29-02-0496>.

⁷⁰ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 176.

⁷¹ Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk*, 302.

⁷² *Essex Gazette*, 23-30 May 1769; in Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 176.

considered frolics, which were work parties that were designed to help a single household, or more commonly, the local clergy.⁷³ One such example of a frolic occurred in Newburyport in 1768 when “the young women of the Presbyterian Congregation, and some others, assembled at the Minister’s House and generously gave Mrs. Parsons the spinning of two Hundred and Seventy skeins of good yarn. They took *Labrador Tea* and coffee for their support.”⁷⁴ Labrador tea was a locally brewed tea, and coffee was considered a more patriotic drink than English tea.⁷⁵ It is significant that 1,839, specifically middle and upper class women participated in these spinning bees.⁷⁶ By the 1760’s only poor and rural women were still spinning because they did not have easy access to markets to be able to purchase cloth.⁷⁷ These women were not spinning because they needed to, but rather were doing it to express their political identity and try to support the nonimportation agreements. For example, Abigail Adams, an elite Massachusetts woman, wrote a letter to her husband stating “As for me I will seek wool and flax and work willingly with my Hands, and indeed [there] is occasion for all our industry and economy.”⁷⁸ Abigail Adams sought out materials so that she could make homespun, despite having the economic wherewithal to purchase British cloth or even purchase pre-made homespun, but instead she chose to spin flax or wool in order to support the American economy. Adams and other elite women decided to spin in order to express their political loyalties and to support the American economy during the revolution.

⁷³ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 178.

⁷⁴ *Boston Gazette*, 9 May 1768; in Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 178.

⁷⁵ Lisa Lynn Petrovich, “More Than the Boston Tea Party: Tea in American Culture, 1760s-1840s” (Graduate diss., University of Colorado, Boulder, 2013), 17 and 49.

⁷⁶ Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 178.

⁷⁷ Carol Berkin, ““It Was I Who Did It”: Women’s Role in the Founding of the Nation,” *Phi Kappa Phi Forum* 86, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 16.

⁷⁸ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 16 October 1774 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

As the homespun movement continued, Americans came to consider certain materials as being more republican than others. The Continental Association of 1774 declared that wool was the best republican material, because it was the furthest thing from the British extravagance of silk and lace.⁷⁹ Women throughout the colonies largely spun linen yarn and woolen cloth that could be turned into homespun clothing items, with a display outside of a printing office touted “a Sample of Cloth, made by a Young Lady in this Town, which is equal in Width, Fineness and Goodness, to an English Plain.”⁸⁰ Spinning good and simple cloth that could be used instead of British cloth gave women the privilege of being responsible for creating an American republican identity separate from English imperial and monarchical styles. Homespun began to be a symbol for patriotism and a physical representation of their support for nonimportation and, eventually, republican simplicity. In 1767, shortly after passage of the Townshend Acts, a Reverend in South Carolina reported “50 Young Ladies all drest in White of their own Spinning” attended one of his Sunday services.⁸¹ And in 1769, the women of Williamsburg, Virginia all wore homespun gowns when they attended a public ball at the capital.⁸² While individual women wore homespun to demonstrate their political ideas, they were also the ones responsible for producing homespun, creating an outward manifestation of republicanism and allowing a large swath of the colonial population to embody this new political identity. For example, in North Carolina, as early as 1769, a newspaper reported that “Many of the Inhabitants of the North and Eastern Parts of this Province have this Winter cloathed themselves in their own Manufactures.”⁸³ Homespun became an important symbol for colonists as a way to demonstrate their political identity, and women not

⁷⁹ Marsh, “Republic’s New Clothes”, 208.

⁸⁰ *Newport Mercury*, June 1770 and 22 May 1769; in Ulrich, *Age of Homespun*, 177.

⁸¹ Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution*, ed. Richard J. Hooker (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1953), 20-21; in Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 75.

⁸² Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, page 73.

⁸³ *South Carolina Gazette*, 2 Mar., 1 June, 10 Aug. 1769; in Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 75.

only created the material that made it possible, but they also decided to partake in the public political statement of wearing homespun.

While homespun was a more popular material in America, women also spun using silk in order to demonstrate and strengthen political relationships with others. After receiving the critical letter from her father, Sally Franklin Bache sent her father twenty-two yards of Pennsylvanian silk as a gift for Queen Marie Antoinette.⁸⁴ The letter sent with the homespun silk claimed that the gift was a way to “shew what can be sent from America to the Looms of France.”⁸⁵ Only seven years earlier, Pennsylvania silk had been sent to George III’s mother as a gift. So, Sally Franklin Bache’s gift served two purposes, to represent the shift in alliances, having allied with France only the year before, but it also served as a demonstration of the potential economic relationship that could exist between America and France if they gained their independence.⁸⁶ Sally Franklin Bache demonstrated her political knowledge and diplomatic skills when she sent the gift of homespun silk to Queen Marie Antoinette.

Once the war began, however, domestic production was not quite enough to meet the demands of the colonial population. The American Manufactory of Philadelphia hired over 400 women for the task of spinning. In August of 1775, a local newspaper printed an advertisement targeting women by saying “in this time of public distress you have each of you an opportunity not only to help to sustain your families, but likewise to call your mite into the treasury of the public good.”⁸⁷ Here, the American Manufactory of Philadelphia was appealing not only to the idea that a woman needed to be able to provide for her family, especially if her husband was

⁸⁴ Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk*, 308.

⁸⁵ Marsh, “Republic’s New Clothes”, 209.

⁸⁶ Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk*, 308.

⁸⁷ *Pennsylvania Packet*, August 7, 1775; in Elizabeth Cometti, “Women in the American Revolution,” *The New England Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (September 1947): 332.

absent, but also to her sense of patriotic duty. By appealing to more than just a woman's domestic duties, the employer was acknowledging that women were spinning for political reasons and were allowing them to continue their efforts on a larger scale.

Once the war began, even with the homespun movement, cloth became shorter in supply, which especially effected the Continental army. The Continental Army was poorly supplied during the war, with the congressional administration often failing to provision the army.⁸⁸ Clothing seemed to be in short supply, with the Marquis de Lafayette responding to an invitation to attend a ball from some women from Baltimore by saying "You are very handsome; you dance very prettily; your ball is very fine—but my soldiers have no shirts."⁸⁹ In attempts to help rectify this situation, women began spinning shirts for the soldiers. During a visit to Philadelphia, Chevalier de Chastellux was shown into a room by Sally Franklin Bache that was filled with shirts made by the women of Philadelphia for their state soldiers. "The ladies bought the linen from their own private purses, and they took a pleasure in cutting them out and sewing them themselves. On each shirt was the name of the married, or unmarried lady who made it, and they amounted to 2200."⁹⁰ Women groups, such as the Daughters of Liberty, formed at this time in order to spin shirts and sheets for soldiers, with the women encouraged to spin their own cloth or use buckskin or doeskin in order to minimize the amount of British cloth used.⁹¹ Provisioning the army using British cloth would undercut America's attempts to prove that they could be

⁸⁸ E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), xi.

⁸⁹ Cometti, "Women in the American Revolution," 334, note 15.

⁹⁰ Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780-81-82* (New York, 1827), 98; in Cometti, "Women in the American Revolution," 333-334.

⁹¹ Wendy Martin, "Women and the American Revolution," *Early American Literature* 11, no. 3 (Winter 1976/1977): 330.

independent, and so women took the extra measures to provision the army while maintaining a republican, independent political identity.

The homespun movement became politicized as it related to republican ideas of virtue and simplicity. Republicanism was a political movement that began shortly after the end of the Seven Years' War.⁹² With the acts increasing taxation, as well as perceived corruption in officials, many colonists criticized Britain, claiming that it was corrupt. With Britain asking for more money, and yet being known for its lavish court style, many colonists began to claim that luxury led to immorality and excess, making one vulnerable to corruption.⁹³ One Virginian newspaper in 1778 even blamed luxury as being the cause for the war, claiming that luxury "begot Arbitrary Power," which in turn "begot Oppression."⁹⁴ In order to combat luxury and corruption, colonists encouraged simplicity in virtue in economic and political practices. One such way to do this was to act for the public good, making individual sacrifices in order to help one's community.⁹⁵ The homespun movement required colonists to participate in boycotts, giving up easy access to cloth, and spin cloth from simpler materials in order to end the unfair and corrupt British taxation acts. Patriots also chose to wear homespun because it was a physical manifestation of their opposition to the extravagant British styles. By creating a distinctly American style, women took republican action and helped the ideological components of the revolution on the homefront.

⁹² James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (June 1987): 14.

⁹³ Michael Zakim, "Sartorial Ideologies: From Homespun to Ready-Made," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 2001): 1556.

⁹⁴ Zakim, "Homespun to Ready-Made," 1556 (note 4).

⁹⁵ Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (April 1982): 335.

With the beginning of the war for independence, Americans shifted their focus to supporting the Continental Army. If the army failed to secure independence, then the new political identities and rhetoric would be crushed by the return of British imperialism. During the Revolutionary War, women organized themselves and took advantage of public events to accomplish political feats. Most notably, Esther Deberdt Reed of Philadelphia organized a city-wide effort to raise funds for the continental army. By employing political rhetoric in her broadside, taking advantage of public events, and sending her campaign plan to other women's organizations Esther Reed altered the domestic sphere of women to allow it to be used for political agendas.

Esther Reed successfully advertised her campaign before it even began, which caused an influx of women willing to volunteer or donate. Esther Deberdt Reed and the Ladies Association of Philadelphia began their fundraising campaign with a strategically timed release of a broadside titled "The Sentiments of an American Woman." The broadside was published on Saturday, June 10, 1780 and it called for women to help the Ladies Association raise money for the Continental Army. The decision to have it released on a Saturday was a strategic move by Esther Reed and the Ladies Association, as the next day people throughout Philadelphia would be gathered for Sunday worship.⁹⁶ By releasing the broadside on Saturday, the Ladies Association ensured that their broadside would be a new topic of discussion in the city, as well as providing an ideal location for face-to-face interactions that would allow the women of the Ladies Association to gather support, either by recruiting more volunteers or receiving donations. The broadside, and fundraising campaign, quickly gained support from patriot women, with one woman writing "Those who were in the country returned without delay...others put off their

⁹⁶ Ireland, *Sentiments*, 182.

departure; those whose state of health was the most delicate, found strength in their patriotism, one lady...having an infant too young to leave...was soon relieved from her distress by a lady...generously offering to nurse it during her absence.”⁹⁷ Patriot women rallied around “The Sentiments of an American Woman” and answered its call to assist the war effort and help the Continental soldiers.

The broadside not only outlined their plans to collect funds, but it also justified women’s roles in the endeavor. “Sentiments” refers to historical examples of virtuous women acting for the public good, and encourages contemporary, patriotic, and republican women to emulate these women. Also, by referring to historical examples of politically minded women, Esther Reed and the Ladies Association provided examples that other American women could look to in order to justify their political identity and actions.⁹⁸ The pamphlet explicitly states “our [the Ladies Association of Philadelphia] ambition is kindled by the same of those heroines...who have rendered their sex illustrious.”⁹⁹ The pamphlet refers to historic women such as Joan of Arc and Batilda, as well as Old Testament women who saved their people such as Deborah, Judith, and Esther as examples and ideals of female patriotism. Esther Reed praised these women and their actions in the broadside because they acted in defense of their communities, their people, and their nation. By offering these women as examples of female patriotism and including other stories of women assisting war efforts through actions such as digging trenches, “The Sentiments” broadside defines women as citizens.¹⁰⁰ While Esther Reed admits that societal expectations “forbid us to march to glory by the same paths as the Men,” it states that both men

⁹⁷ “A Letter from a Lady in Philadelphia to her Friend in this Place, 20 June 1780,” *Maryland Gazette*, July 21, 1780; in Ireland, *Sentiments*, 182.

⁹⁸ Emily J. Arendt, ““Ladies Going About for Money”: Female Voluntary Associations and Civic Consciousness in the American Revolution,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 166.

⁹⁹ Reed, *Sentiments of an American Woman*.

¹⁰⁰ Ireland, *Sentiments*, 190.

and women are “born to Liberty,” and therefore they both have the responsibility of protecting the republic, but in different ways.¹⁰¹ “The Sentiments of an American Woman” sought to mobilize the women of Philadelphia by defining and providing a heroic and virtuous political role for women during the war.

While “Sentiments of an American Woman” began the fundraising campaign, the social organization and tactics used by the Ladies Association ensured the entire city of Philadelphia was targeted, creating a more profitable campaign. Attached to “The Sentiments” broadside was a plan titled “Ideas, relative to the manner of forwarding to the American Soldiers, the Presents of the American Women” outlining the Ladies Association’s plans for conducting the campaign.¹⁰² The Ladies Association began by dividing the city into ten districts, and another district near Germantown.¹⁰³ Once the city was divided, thirty-six volunteers, usually in teams of two to four, would go around a specific area of the city soliciting donations and recording the donor’s name and gift amount.¹⁰⁴ The fundraising campaign was designed to be more inclusive than any previous efforts done by men, with the Ladies Association instructions stating that the volunteers should seek donations from every woman and “the shilling offered by the widow or the young girl, will be received as well as the most considerable sums presented by the women who have...greater means to be useful.”¹⁰⁵ By soliciting donations from every woman, despite their economic conditions, not only was the Ladies Association ensuring that their campaign would be more successful due to the number of possible donators, but they were also allowing every woman to claim the political role laid out for them in the “Sentiments” broadside. Over the

¹⁰¹ Reed, *Sentiments of an American Woman*; and Ireland, *Sentiments*, 189-190.

¹⁰² Arendt, “Ladies Going about for Money,” 166, note 13.

¹⁰³ Arendt, “Ladies Going About for Money,” 171.

¹⁰⁴ Ireland, *Sentiments*, 183.

¹⁰⁵ *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), June 10, 1780; in Arendt, “Ladies Going About for Money,” 171.

course of three weeks and three days, the Ladies Association collected donations from sixteen hundred people amounting to over \$300,000.¹⁰⁶

With the success of the Philadelphian campaign, other Ladies Associations in other states copied Esther Reed's plans to fundraise for their soldiers. Esther even wrote to the wives of political officials in other states, including copies of her broadside and the plans of the Ladies Association, so that they might complete a similar fundraising campaign.¹⁰⁷ Newspapers in other states even reprinted the "Sentiments" broadside, alongside reports of the Ladies Association's activities. In the plans of the Ladies Association, the group included advice for groups that would replicate the fundraising campaign, such as appointing a treasurer to keep track of donations collected by volunteers and to present the total amount to the wife of the state's governor or president. That woman would then send the donation to Martha Washington, or George Washington if Martha was not present at camp.¹⁰⁸ These instructions make it clear that these fundraising campaigns were under the control and jurisdiction of women, going through a network of women so that the funds would eventually reach the army. At least three other states; New Jersey, Maryland, and Virginia, replicated the fundraiser, which spanned to include multiple counties, rather than being limited to a single city.¹⁰⁹ Just like in Philadelphia, women were the ones in charge of the fundraising efforts. For example, in New Jersey, thirteen counties agreed to participate in the campaign, and each county had a designated leader. Four women oversaw the entire campaign and coordinated efforts with each of the county-level leaders.¹¹⁰ Once the funds were collected, the county leaders were instructed to send them to a "Treasurers,

¹⁰⁶ Ireland, *Sentiments*, 183.

¹⁰⁷ Ireland, *Sentiments*, 183.

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, "Ladies Going About for Money," 175.

¹⁰⁹ Arendt, "Ladies Going About for Money," 175-179.

¹¹⁰ Arendt, "Ladies Going About for Money," 176.

to be disposed by the Commander in Chief.”¹¹¹ The women at the highest level of the Association were the ones who coordinated their efforts with Washington.¹¹² The repetition of the fundraising campaign began by Esther Reed and the Ladies Association in Philadelphia indicates a widespread sense of political responsibility among patriot women. These women in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia all took political action, creating highly organized associations in order to support the revolution.

With the success of a campaign organized by women and conducted in public, there was little to no criticism of the women’s actions from other patriots. Despite acting in ways that might have been outside of expected female behavior, criticism for the fundraising campaign largely came from Loyalists. One woman, Anna Rawle, was a Loyalist with a personal distaste for Esther Deberdt Reed. Rawle wrote scathing remarks about the fundraising campaign, suggesting that the methods that the female patriots used to collect the money was ‘feminine extortion.’¹¹³ However, outside of Anna Rawle, the reception of these Ladies Associations was largely positive, with praise being given by men and women. Benjamin Rush offered praise to the women, and proudly added that his wife had participated in the campaign for donations and had “distinguished herself by her zeal and address in this business.”¹¹⁴ One author writing for the *Pennsylvania Packet*, claimed that “the women of every part of the globe are under obligations to

¹¹¹ “Trenton, July 4, 1780” *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), July 5, 1780; in Arendt, “Ladies Going About for Money,” 176.

¹¹² Arendt, “Ladies Going About for Money,” 176.

¹¹³ Arendt, “Ladies Going About for Money,” 180-181.

¹¹⁴ Benjamin Rush to John Adams, Philadelphia, July 13, 1780, in Benjamin Rush, *Letters*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press for the American Philosophical Society, 1951), 1:253; in Ireland, *Sentiments*, 185.

those of America, for having shown that females are capable of the highest political virtue.”¹¹⁵
Women were being praised, and recognized, for their political efforts to support the revolution.

During the revolution, domestic conditions were altered, making it difficult to provision a family, let alone the Continental Army. During these hardships, patriot women stepped up in order to support the revolution. By acting in a way that clearly expressed their political identities, American women were clearly participating in out-of-doors politics. Through spinning bees, wearing homespun, and collecting donations for the Continental army women expressed their political identity, as well as created new political roles for themselves.

¹¹⁵ “For the Pennsylvania Packet,” *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), Nov. 4, 1780; in Arendt, “Ladies Going About for Money,” 182-183.

Chapter 3: Food Riots, Camp Followers, and Fighting Women

On March 22, 1802 Deborah Sampson, a veteran of the American Revolution, gave a speech detailing her experiences during the Revolutionary War, including her enlistment as a private in the 4th Massachusetts Regiment. “Wrought upon at length by an enthusiasm and frenzy that could brook no control, I burst the tyrant bonds, which held my sex in awe, and clandestinely, or by stealth, grasped an opportunity, which custom and the world seemed to deny, as a natural privilege.” Even through all of the hardships that accompany war, such as “poverty, hunger, nakedness, cold, and disease” Sampson tells her audience how she “threw off the soft habiliment of my sex, and assumed those of the warrior, already prepared for battle.”¹¹⁶ However, Deborah Sampson was not the only woman to assume this new ‘warrior’ role during the revolution. During the social upheaval caused by the revolution some women took to the streets and led food riots, followed the Continental Army as dependents and businesswomen, and, some even assumed the role of soldier. These women acted in new ways politically, sometimes through violent means, in order to support the revolutionary war. By looking at these women and their more forceful political actions, one can better understand women’s roles in the military aspects of the independence movement.

During the revolution, some merchants took advantage of the dire economic situation to improve their own situation, which angered many of their neighbors. When the colonies were faced with the Sugar Act, Stamp Act, Townshend Acts, and Coercive Acts many people; men and women alike, practiced non-importation. Rather than continuing to purchase imported British products, colonists bought local products, and even produced their own goods. During

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth Evans, *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975), 322.

this period of non-importation, the price of goods and market conditions became directly linked with patriotism.¹¹⁷ Both merchants and consumers could be labeled as Patriot or Loyalists based on their participation, or lack thereof, in the non-importation movement. However, once fighting began, trade routes were completely disrupted, which led to significant supply shortages, especially as both armies attempted to provision their soldiers. In order to reinvigorate the economy and pay for the war, the Continental Congress issued a large quantity of paper money, known as Continental dollars. Congress was forced into this decision, as they did not have the power to raise taxes and state taxes were too low to fund the revolution for any significant length of time. With nothing to back the Continental dollars, rampant inflation occurred, with the currency's worth falling from a dollar to only ten cents in the span of a year and a half.¹¹⁸ Mercy Otis Warren referred to Continental dollars as "immense heaps of paper trash."¹¹⁹ Prices of goods drastically increased, such as corn which rose from two shillings in early 1776 to 180 shillings in February of 1780. With the rising price of goods, many consumers complained to Congress that they could no longer afford necessities at 'fair' prices and demanded that price controls be instituted. Farmers and merchants, on the other hand opposed price controls because they wanted the best prices possible for their commodities.¹²⁰

Merchants who practiced forestalling angered their neighbors, with the corrupt act being seen as a threat to republican ideas of virtue. Forestalling was the practice in which merchants withheld or monopolized scarce goods in order to increase their profit.¹²¹ This caused significant

¹¹⁷ Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 114, no. 1 (January 1990): 14.

¹¹⁸ Gary B. Nash, *Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 309.

¹¹⁹ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 309, note 1.

¹²⁰ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 310.

¹²¹ Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 310.

tension with their neighbors, as they compared the merchants' monopolies with the British acts that sparked the revolution.¹²² Before the revolution, colonists began to equate British luxury to corruption, so they turned to republicanism, the opposite of extravagant monarchism. Republicanism encouraged virtue and individual sacrifice for the greater good in economic and political practices, in order to avoid the corruption that followed luxury.¹²³ With the merchants hoarding already scarce goods, they were acting selfishly, rather than for the greater good, going against republican ideas, which led to them being labeled as Loyalists. Washington even wrote to Congress that forestalling was the "want of virtue" and warned that "unless extortion, forestalling, and other practices, which have crept in and become exceedingly prevalent and injurious to the common cause, can meet with proper checks, we must inevitably sink under such a load of accumulated oppression."¹²⁴ With merchants violating the virtue of their communities, some Americans took action against the corrupt merchants. For example, some of the citizens of Longmeadow, Connecticut provided a warning to three merchants who had marked up the prices of molasses, sugar, salt, and rum. "Every man whose actions are unfriendly to the common cause of our country ought to be convinced of his wrong behavior and made to reform, or treated as an open enemy." The citizens went on in their warning to state that the raising of prices "is very detrimental to the liberties of America."¹²⁵ If merchants put personal gain before community welfare they could be labeled as Loyalists, regardless of their actual political leanings.

¹²² Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 235.

¹²³ Michael Zakim, "Sartorial Ideologies: From Homespun to Ready-Made," *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 2001): 1556.

¹²⁴ Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 12 vols. (Boston: American Stationers' Company, 1847), 6:91; in Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 312.

¹²⁵ Barbara Clark Smith, *After the Revolution: The Smithsonian History of Everyday Life in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 35-35; in Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 233.

Women who remained at home often had to provide food for their families while also managing farms and shops in the absence of men.¹²⁶ The inflation of currency, coupled with the rising costs and scarcity of goods made it difficult for women to provide for themselves or their families. Poor women and the wives of common soldiers especially suffered. Not only were the wives of soldiers having to adjust to new domestic duties, but the pay their husbands received was inconsistent and was not enough to feed a family. For example, a wife could not buy a barrel of wheat even if they had four months of a soldier's pay sent to them.¹²⁷ Many women worried about feeding their family and began to write their husbands begging them to come home. One soldier's wife wrote to him in desperation, telling him "I am without bread, the Committee will not supply me, my children will starve, or if they do not, they must freeze, we have no wood, neither can we get any—Pray Come Home."¹²⁸ Women became desperate because inflation made it difficult, nearly impossible, for them to feed their families, so merchant forestalling and increasing the price of already costly goods made these women angry.

Women participated in and often led food riots, granting them some retribution against corrupt merchants and sell goods to community members at a fair price. Beginning in 1776 and continuing through 1779, merchants throughout the states became the targets of food riots. In 1776, after the British evacuated the city of Boston, many merchants hoarded certain goods, like coffee and sugar. With women responsible for providing for their households they organized and led food riots in order to distribute the scarce goods to the community.¹²⁹ Abigail Adams witnessed on food riot and wrote a description of the event to her husband. "It was rumored that

¹²⁶ Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, 233.

¹²⁷ Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 33.

¹²⁸ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 33, note 11.

¹²⁹ "The Female Food Riots of the American Revolution," *New England Historical Society*, last modified 2019, <http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/the-female-food-riots-of-the-american-revolution/>.

an eminent, wealthy, stingy Merchant...had a Hogsheaf of Coffee in his Store which he refused to sell... A Number of Females some say a hundred, some say more assembled with a cart and marched down to the Warehouse and demanded the keys, which he refused to deliver, upon which one of them seized him by his Neck and tossed him into the cart. Upon his finding no Quarter he delivered the keys, when they tipped up the cart and discharged him, then opened the Warehouse, hoisted out the Coffee themselves, put it into the trucks and drove off.” Abigail goes on to say that other witnesses claimed that the women even spanked the merchant while men just looked on.¹³⁰ Abigail Adam’s support is especially telling considering that the merchant being targeted, Thomas Boylston, was the first cousin of John Adam’s mother.¹³¹ Despite family ties to the merchant, Abigail Adams supported the actions of the food rioters, labeling five merchants in Salem as “Tories” when they monopolized goods, increasing the scarcity of already scarce goods.¹³² By labeling the merchants as Loyalists for their actions, Abigail Adams, newspapers, and other Americans ensured that anyone who stood against these merchants and attempted to rectify the situation would be considered Patriots.

Women also gained additional power during food riots as they often would appoint one woman from the group to be responsible for selling the seized goods at a fair price back to the community. For example, in Beverly, Massachusetts in November of 1777 sixty women and a few men seized sugar from one merchant and forced other merchants to surrender their sugar. The food rioters appointed a female shopkeeper to sell all of the sugar at a fair price.¹³³ Placing a

¹³⁰ Abigail Adams to John Adams, July 31, 1777, in *Adams Family Papers* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society), https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17770730aa&bc=%2Fdigitaladams%2Farchive%2Fbrows e%2Fletters_1774_1777.php.

¹³¹ Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, 232.

¹³² Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, 237.

¹³³ Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, 237.

woman in charge of redistribution shows that out of all the rioters they could have put in charge of selling the sugar, they trusted a woman to be able to be patriotic and sell the goods at an equitable price. Another food riot occurred in Fishkill, New York in August 1776. There, an alderman named Jacobus Lefferts was accused of sending tea north in order to sell it for a drastically increased price. A group of women assembled in a house, and even attempted to gain the support of three men who passed by. When the men refused to help, they were placed under guard at the house. The group of women then chose a “committee of ladies” to lead the riot, and then the group marched to Lefferts’ store and offered to buy the tea at the continental price of 6s per pound. When Lefferts refused, the women appointed a clerk and a weigher and took two boxes of tea, which they sold to the community at 6s per pound. According to the newspaper that reported the incident, the women planned to send their proceeds to the Revolutionary county committee.¹³⁴ In this instance, when the merchant refused to sell the tea at the locally accepted price, the women seized his property and redistributed it to community members. These patriotic women not only confronted a ‘Loyalist’ merchant, but they also chose to give the proceeds of their efforts to a patriotic committee, rather than giving it to a church or local organization. Women were not only trusted to be patriotic and virtuous enough to sell goods at fair prices, but they also actively demonstrated their support of the war effort by sending the profit to a revolutionary committee rather than increasing anyone’s personal wealth.

While some female patriots remained at home, there were many others who chose to follow and directly support the Continental army. Life as a camp follower was not easy with the women facing the same rough conditions as the male soldiers, as well having the added disadvantage of being dependent in a male dominated and controlled environment. However,

¹³⁴ *Constitutional Gazette*, Aug. 26, 1776; in Smith, “Food Rioters,” 7-8.

becoming a camp follower was a decision that women made independently, as they chose to leave their familiar surroundings and established support networks in order to follow the Continental Army.¹³⁵ Moreover, women provided an additional, and cheap, labor source for the Continental Army. In turn, the army legitimized the women's presence in camps by supplying them with jobs and payment.¹³⁶ Not all women who followed the army were destitute, however, with sutlers, prostitutes, and officers' wives also traveling alongside the continental soldiers.¹³⁷ Sutlers were merchants who had been granted permission to sell goods to the soldiers, while the people who followed the army for more personal reasons were referred to as retainers.¹³⁸ While camp followers were often looked down upon by the soldiers and officers, even George Washington admitted that they were necessary for the morale and strength of the army. In a letter to Robert Morris, Washington admitted that if he failed to provide provisions for "the extra women in these Regiments," he would lose "by Desertion-perhaps to the Enemy-some of the oldest and best Soldiers in the Service."¹³⁹ Many camp followers were also encouraged to act as nurses, some even being paid for their efforts, because the army could not afford to lose potential soldiers for nursing duties.¹⁴⁰ Camp followers were essential for the success and morale of the Continental Army, thus holding a lot of sway over the army through their actions. If the camp followers abandoned the army and their cause, the fight for independence might not have been successful.

¹³⁵ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 52.

¹³⁶ Holly A. Mayer, "Belonging to the Army: Camp followers and the Military Community during the American Revolution," PH.D. dissertation (College of William and Mary, 1990), 6.

¹³⁷ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mother*, 53.

¹³⁸ Mayer, "Belonging to the Army," 6.

¹³⁹ "From George Washington to Robert Morris, 29 January 1783," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Janice E. McKenny, "'Women in Combat': Comment," *Armed Forces and Society* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1982): 686-687; in Mayer, "Belonging to the Army," 15, note 35 (McKenny, "Comment," 686-687).

Camp followers performed necessary chores in the camps which ensured that the soldiers could devote more attention to their military duties. One of the main responsibilities for camp followers was to serve as washerwomen for the soldiers, both the officers and the enlisted men. Women were especially necessary as washerwomen as most men considered laundry to be a feminine task and refused to do it themselves.¹⁴¹ Washing clothes was also a way for the army to justify the reasons for providing the women with rations.¹⁴² Some women were payed set wages by the army for their efforts, “for a Shirt, two Shillings; Woolen Breeches, Vest and Overalls, two shillings, each; Linen Vest & Breeches, one Shilling, each; Linen Overalls, one Shilling & Six Pence, each; Stockings & Handkerchief, Six Pence, each; The Women who wash for the Companies will observe these regulations.”¹⁴³ The wages paid by the army were considered to be extremely low and the army could only afford to pay a certain number washerwoman per regiment, so some woman set up their own shops, charging higher, but still fair market prices.¹⁴⁴ Many soldiers, even some of the higher ranking officers, found it difficult to pay for laundry services, so many regiments threatened to drum out women who failed to charge fair prices for their laundry services. “Should any woman refuse to wash for a soldier at the above rate he must make complaint to the officers...who [if they] find it proceeds from laziness or any other improper excuse” could dismiss the woman from camp.¹⁴⁵ Despite the threats to drum a woman out of camp, in reality soldiers and officers had limited choices. They refused to do the laundry themselves, and if they hired a woman to come into camp to do the laundry, they risked being the subject of scandalous gossip. The officers especially were aware people might speculate as to

¹⁴¹ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 56.

¹⁴² Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 40.

¹⁴³ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 57, note 11.

¹⁴⁴ Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 40.

¹⁴⁵ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 57, note 11.

why they needed private laundry service and if there were alternative reasons as to why the officer had paid the woman to come into the camp.¹⁴⁶ One such officer was Colonel Ebenezer Huntington, who had an outstanding washing bill greater than his wages due to the effects of inflation. He proposed a solution to “hire some Woman to live in Camp to do the Washing for myself and some of the Officers,” although he quickly admitted “I am aware that many Persons will tell the Story to my disadvantage.”¹⁴⁷ Both convenience and fear of gossip gave camp followers a fair amount of power when determining their wages, however they could not set their labor price too high for fear of being drummed out of camp.

While camp followers fell under the jurisdiction of the Continental Army the women would occasionally disobey direct orders without punishment. During marches, retainers were expected to march behind the baggage carts, despite the women being burdened with bags and children.¹⁴⁸ Many women refused to march, and instead rode inside the baggage carts. This frustrated the soldiers, especially General Washington who issued eight army-wide orders prohibiting women from riding in the baggage carts.¹⁴⁹ “The Women are forbid any longer under any License at all to ride in the Wagons.”¹⁵⁰ These orders and the officers who attempted to enforce them experienced little success, with the camp followers stubbornly continuing to ride on the baggage wagons.¹⁵¹ These female retainers, while part of the army, could disobey martial orders through stubborn and collective efforts. Camp followers made sacrifices in order to survive and continue support the continental army, however there were clearly limits as to their

¹⁴⁶ Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 194.

¹⁴⁷ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 57, note 12.

¹⁴⁸ Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 11.

¹⁴⁹ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 55.

¹⁵⁰ General Orders, Headquarters, St[e]nton near Germantown, 23 August 1777, & General Orders, Headquarters, Wilmington, 28 August 1777, Valley Forge Orderly Book, 19-20, 24-25); in Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 42.

¹⁵¹ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 55.

sacrifices and what military orders they would follow. Another example of camp followers defying martial orders can be found as the Continental army marched through Philadelphia after it had been abandoned by the British in June 1778. For this march, George Washington ordered for the women and children to march through alleys and side streets, with the baggage in the rear of the army, or to march outside of the city entirely. However, “the army had barely passed through the main thoroughfares before these camp followers poured after their soldiers again,” and both the army and the camp followers marched through the reclaimed city of Philadelphia.¹⁵² Rather than be hidden away, these women disobeyed orders from General Washington in order to publicly demonstrate that they were an important part of the army.

Camp followers often struggled to obtain basic necessities, and were often looked down upon by soldiers, however they chose to endure these hardships and continue helping the army. Much like the soldiers, women were poorly provisioned during the war and what little clothes they had quickly became haggard due to the marches and harsh weather conditions. One soldier in the Continental army, Daniel Granger, recalled that the women marching behind the baggage carts wore “short Petty coats,” and were “bare footed & bare Leged,” although Granger remarked that the women seemed “silent, civil, and looked quite subdued.”¹⁵³ Another soldier, Joseph Plumb Martin, recalled seeing camp followers, comparing the women to “a caravan of wild beasts could bear no comparison with it...“some in rags and some in jags,” but none “in velvet

¹⁵² John U. Rees, “The Number of Rations Issued to the Women in Camp: New Material Concerning Female Followers with Continental Regiments,” *The Brigade Dispatch*. Vols. 27 and 28, 16; in Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 55-56.

¹⁵³ John U. Rees, “‘Some in rags and some in jags,’ but none ‘in velvet gowns’: Insights on Clothing Worn by Female Followers of the Armies During the American War for Independence,” *Association of Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1990), 2; in Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 51.

gowns.”¹⁵⁴ Just like the continental soldiers, female camp followers constantly dealt with inadequate clothing during long marches. However, the military and civilian organizations that sent clothing for soldiers did not send clothing for the camp followers, as they did not consider it their responsibility to clothe the women and children. Due to this, many women took coats and shirts from dead and dying soldiers to replace their thin clothes.¹⁵⁵ Some women were so desperate to acquire new clothes that they would wander battlefields, while the conflict was still raging around them, in order to strip dead soldiers of their belongings. One soldier, Ambrose Collins, details an incident of women trying to do this very thing.¹⁵⁶ “I saw one woman thus employed struck by a cannon ball and literally dashed to pieces.”¹⁵⁷ Camp followers risked their lives simply to clothe themselves and yet they continued to take such risks rather than deserting. Woman underwent significant hardships as camp followers in order to survive and yet they continued to cook, do laundry, and follow the Continental Army.

Camp followers experienced the same hardships as the continental soldiers and were subject to the same punishments. As necessary as the camp followers were, they also caused significant problems for the continental army. Woman would steal; provoke soldiers into fighting each other or convince them to desert; sell liquor to the troops illegally; shout at officers over issues of provisions, rations, or sexual advancements; and cheat on their husbands.¹⁵⁸ There are a couple of instances of the army admitting harsh punishments to camp followers, with theft and prostitution being the crimes that received the harshest punishments. For example, Mary Johnson

¹⁵⁴ Joseph Plumb Martin, ed. George F. Scheer, *Private Yankee Doodle: Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), 197.

¹⁵⁵ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 54.

¹⁵⁶ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 55.

¹⁵⁷ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 55, note 6.

¹⁵⁸ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 61.

was accused of attempting to persuade soldiers at Valley Forge to desert. In punishment, she received one hundred lashes. Isabella MacMahan received the same punishment for receiving goods which she knew to be stolen.¹⁵⁹ The Colonel of the 1st New York regiment ordered “no Woman of Ill Fame [prostitute] Shall be permitted to Come into the Barricks on pain of Being well Watred under a pump.”¹⁶⁰ However, the most common punishment for various infractions was to be drummed out of camp. For example, in August of 1782 a garrison commander issued an order to stop soldiers and camp followers from plundering corn fields surrounding the camp. “The Women who are found guilty of the like, shall be drummed out of the Corps.”¹⁶¹ The army looked for excuses to drum women out of the camps, in order to reduce their numbers and relieve some of the problems of feeding and traveling with all of the camp followers. A few days after the warning was posted to curb plundering another notice was posted stating “any Women who may be found with the Regiment after this [order], that has not belonged to the Regiment prior to their arrival at this Post; and who cannot produce Permission in writing...of their continuance— may depend on being drummed Out of the Corps.”¹⁶² Even after being drummed out of the camp, however, many women returned to the army.¹⁶³ No matter what the continental army did, they could not significantly reduce camp follower numbers. The woman chose to return to the army due to personal connections, the chance to make a profit, or out of necessity.

¹⁵⁹ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 61.

¹⁶⁰ Headquarters New York City, 7 May 1776, Orderly Book, Colonel Alexander McDougall's 1st New York Regiment, 25 March- 15 June 1776, New York-Historical Society's Collection of Early American Orderly Books (microfilm, David Library); in Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 138.

¹⁶¹ Garrison Orders, probably West Point but may be Burlington, New Jersey, 16 August 1782, Lamb's 2CA Orderly Book, 9 August- 27 November 1782; in Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 186.

¹⁶² After Orders, West Point or Burlington, 26 August 1782, Lamb's 2CA Orderly Book, 9 August- 27 November 1782; in Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 186-187 (note 89).

¹⁶³ Mayer, “Belonging to the Army,” 187.

Camp followers also came into direct contact with the violence of war, both purposefully and accidentally. During marches camp followers were expected to stay with the baggage wagons and they were expected to stay with them during battles as well. Staying with the baggage ensured that they were relatively safe and out of the way during battles. However, staying with the baggage wagons could prove to be dangerous for the camp followers, as protection for the wagons was often poor, making them ideal targets for ambushes by British soldiers.¹⁶⁴ Other camp followers chose to walk onto battlefields for the express purpose of helping the soldiers. During the battle of Brandywine some of the soldiers' wives took "the empty canteens of their husbands and friends and returned with them filled with water...during the hottest part of the engagement."¹⁶⁵ Despite knowing the dangers of walking across the battlefield, these camp followers chose to help the soldiers, ensuring they stayed hydrated during the battle. Even Sarah Osborn, a cook for George Washington's, walked through the trenches at Yorktown giving "beef, and bread, and coffee...to the soldiers in the entrenchments."¹⁶⁶ These camp followers risked their lives in order to provide for the soldiers, doing what was in their power to try and keep the soldiers alive during battle.

Civilian women also took drastic measures fighting British soldiers, even targeting specific soldiers known to be carrying important information. In a frontier cabin located in Georgia one woman, Nancy Hart defended her home by shooting two British soldiers and holding more at gunpoint until help could arrive.¹⁶⁷ Nancy Hart was defending her home, but she also chose to violently resist the British soldiers, single-handedly going against multiple armed

¹⁶⁴ Mayer, "Belonging to the Army," 12.

¹⁶⁵ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 59, note 14.

¹⁶⁶ Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 59, note 14.

¹⁶⁷ Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, 14.

soldiers, rather than passively allowing them onto her property. Her efforts may have also led to the capture of the British soldiers she held at gunpoint. Two sisters-in-law in South Carolina; Grace and Rachael Martin, learned a courier carrying important information would be passing near their house. The two women disguised themselves in men's clothing and armed themselves with pistols and lie in wait along the road until the courier and his escorts appeared. Grace and Rachael stopped them in the road and forced them to turn over their dispatches.¹⁶⁸ Another instance of women targeting specific soldiers in order to gain information occurred in Massachusetts. There, a group of women dressed themselves in their husbands' clothes and lie in wait in some thickets. They were waiting for Captain Leonard Whiting to pass by, as he carried important British documents from Canada on his way to Boston. Armed with pitchforks and muskets, the women forced Whiting from his horse, retrieved the papers from his boots, and then marched him to the Groton jail.¹⁶⁹ The Martin women and the group of Massachusetts women took action, using subterfuge and force, to gain information about the enemy in order to pass it along to the continental army. Some women were simply defending their homes, like Nancy Hart, while others sought out specific soldiers, like the Martin sisters and the group of women from Massachusetts. Either way, all these civilians assisted the revolutionary war effort through their actions.

While some women fought the British from their own homes, others directly participated in the war and fought alongside men on the battlefield. In order to do this, some women disguised themselves as men in order to fight as soldiers in the war. One of the most well-known women to do so was Deborah Sampson-Gannett. In late March of 1802, she appeared at the

¹⁶⁸ Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, 14.

¹⁶⁹ Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, 14.

Federal-Street Theatre in Boston, Massachusetts, as part of a larger speaking tour traveling through Massachusetts and New York. For four nights the former soldier, dressed in uniform and carrying a musket, performed twenty-seven maneuvers and then delivered a speech to the audience.¹⁷⁰ Deborah Sampson had disguised herself as a man and served for three years towards the end of the American Revolution under the moniker Robert Shurtleff. When talking about her motivations to enlist to the assembled crowd, Sampson stated “my mind became agitated with the enquiry—why a nation, separated from us by an ocean more than three thousand miles in extent, should endeavor to enforce on us plans of subjugation.” Possibly to temper this admission, Sampson admits “perhaps nothing but the critical juncture of the times could have excused such a philosophical disquisition of politics in woman, notwithstanding it was a theme of universal speculation and concern to man.”¹⁷¹ Deborah Sampson, at least post-war, demonstrated that she had strong political and patriotic opinions, which is why she enlisted in the army. Sampson wanted to fight for her political opinions in a way that was denied to women at the time.

During the war, Deborah Sampson demonstrated her devotion to the revolutionary war effort by taking drastic actions in order to continue fighting. In June of 1782, Sampson was injured, being shot in the thigh, an injury she considered to be “a death wound, or as being equivalent to it; as it must, I thought, lead to the discovery of my sex.” Afraid of being discovered she begged her fellow soldiers to leave her to die, “preferring to take the small chance...of surviving, rather than to be carried to the hospital.” When soldiers refused to listen to her and carried her to the hospital, Deborah being so afraid of being revealed to be a woman

¹⁷⁰ Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, 317.

¹⁷¹ Deborah Sampson, “An Address Delivered in 1802 in Various Towns in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York,” *Publications of the Sharon Historical Society*, no. 2 (April 1905); in Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, 321-322.

“drew a pistol from the holster, and was about to put an end to my life.”¹⁷² Deborah Sampson patched up the wound by herself and rejoined the army before her thigh had fully healed. Sampson even admitted “had the most hardy soldier been in the condition I was when I left the hospital, he would have been excused from military duty.”¹⁷³ Here, Sampson admits that she could have been excused from military duty or at least stayed in the hospital longer to recover, but instead she chose to return to active duty. After falling sick a doctor discovered that she was a woman, but chose not to reveal Sampson’s true gender to the army.¹⁷⁴ Even though a doctor had learned of Sampson’s true identity, she went on a land survey expedition with the 11th Massachusetts Regiment, before ultimately being honorably discharged on October 23, 1783.¹⁷⁵ Deborah Sampson was considered to be an exemplary soldier by her peers, and her dedication to her duties as a soldier prove her to be an exemplary patriot as well.¹⁷⁶

One specific combatant role that camp followers fulfilled has led to the national myth of ‘Molly Pitcher’. In modern America, Molly Pitcher is considered to be a singular woman who manned a cannon after her husband fell during the Battle of Monmouth, however based on historic record Molly Pitcher actually represents multiple different women who stepped in to assist soldiers in firing the cannons.¹⁷⁷ Molly Pitchers during the American Revolution were camp followers who would carry water to and from the battlefield in order to cool and clean the cannons.¹⁷⁸ Firing a cannon required a minimum of three men to operate meaning that women

¹⁷² Herman Mann, *The Female Review: or, Memoirs of an American young lady* (Dedham, Massachusetts: Nathaniel and Benjamin Henton, 1797); in Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, quote from a primary source, 308.

¹⁷³ Mann, *The Female Review*; in Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, 309.

¹⁷⁴ Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, 312.

¹⁷⁵ Evans, *Weathering the Storm*, 315.

¹⁷⁶ Claire R. Williams, “More than a Housewife: Revolutionary Era Women in War,” (MadRush Conference: Spring 2014), 14.

¹⁷⁷ Linda Grant De Pauw, “Women in Combat: The Revolutionary War Experience,” *Armed Forces & Society* 7, no. 2 (January 1981), 215.

¹⁷⁸ Williams, “More than a Housewife,” 15.

carrying the water was essential because the army needed every man it could in order to effectively man the artillery. It also meant that if one of the men operating the cannons was killed, injured, or passed out due to heat stroke, the cannon would become inoperable. If a cannon became inoperable due to a fallen man, one of the pitchers might step in to take his place and keep the cannon operating, since they had repeatedly observed how to properly fire a cannon.¹⁷⁹ Some of the most well-documented ‘Molly Pitchers’ were Anna Maria Lane, Margaret Corbin, and Mary Hays McCauley. All three women were running water to and from the battlefield until their husbands were injured in battle, after which they stepped up to take his place.¹⁸⁰ One soldier, Joseph Plumb Martin, recalls his encounter with a ‘Molly Pitcher’ during the Battle of Monmouth in a book written over fifty years after the event occurred. “A woman...attended with her husband at the piece [cannon] the whole time. While in the act of reaching a cartridge...a cannon shot from the enemy passed directly between her legs without doing any other damage than carrying away all the lower part of her petticoat.” Martin recalls that the woman after “looking at [her petticoat] with apparent unconcern...observed that it was lucky it did not pass a little higher...and continued her occupation.”¹⁸¹ While it is difficult to disentangle the myth of “Molly Pitcher,” the historical records of all the various Molly Pitchers demonstrate that not only did women assist battlefield efforts, but some of them even went as far as to fill in for a fallen artilleryman at a moment’s notice.

The Revolutionary War caused significant disruption to the daily lives of Americans. Despite the disruption, patriotic women chose to support of the war effort, acting both from the homestead and the battlefield. Food rioters ensured that scarce goods could be sold at fair prices

¹⁷⁹ De Pauw, “Women in Combat,” 216.

¹⁸⁰ Williams, “More than a Housewife,” 14-16.

¹⁸¹ Martin and Scheer, *Private Yankee Doodle*, 133.

in the marketplace, allowing the women who remained at home to continue to be able to feed their families, creating a positive effect on domestic morale. Also punishing political dissidents and thus further entrenching American republican identities. Camp followers chose to leave home, and instead provided vital support to the Continental army. Although they were a part of the army, camp followers asserted their own power where they could by profiting from their experience or refusing to follow certain orders. Despite their occasional disobedience, camp followers helped increase the morale of the soldiers, allowing for the war to continue. Finally, there were women who directly participated in the fight for independence against Britain. Individual women confronted soldiers and gained crucial information, disguised themselves as men in order to serve as a soldier in the army, and “Molly Pitchers” stepped in at crucial moments to help with artillery barrages. These women’s decision to support the revolutionary war and the surrounding political movement for independence was one aspect that allowed the Continental army to defeat the British and gain its independence. By looking at these women and their actions, one can understand the various roles that women played in the military conflict of the American Revolution.

Conclusion

On May 7, 1776 Abigail Adams sat down in Braintree, Massachusetts to pen another letter to her husband, John Adams. “I believe tis near ten days since I wrote you a line. I have not felt in a humour to entertain you.”¹⁸² Not only was she upset with the British activity in Boston, but she was also upset with her husband. She believed his response to her earlier “Remember the Ladies” letter was callous, with John Adams writing “We have only the Name of Masters, and rather than give up this, which would completely subject Us to the Despotism of the Peticoat.”¹⁸³ In her response, Abigail Adams points out the hypocrisy of John Adams’ revolutionary actions, “whilst you are proclaiming peace and good will to Men, Emancipating all Nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power over Wives.” Once again, Abigail Adams cautions her husband by stating “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.”¹⁸⁴ Abigail Adams used the political arguments used against the tyranny of the King to point out the hypocrisy of the statements if the Continental Congress continued to deny increasing women’s rights. During the revolution, many other women participated in the world of politics on both the homefront and the battlefield, to confront the variety of their experiences.

¹⁸² Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 7 - 9 May 1776 [electronic edition], *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

¹⁸³ Letter from John Adams to Abigail Adams, 14 April 1776 [electronic edition], *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

¹⁸⁴ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 7 - 9 May 1776 [electronic edition], *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>.

During the American Revolution patriotic women involved themselves in the political realm in order to support the independence movement. On the homefront women communicated with each other, expressing their political identities and spun cloth to support the American economy during the period of non-importation, simultaneously spinning a new American identity. Women also created female voluntary organizations in order to raise funds for the Continental Army and dispensed justice to local merchants whose selfish actions threatened the community and patriotic ideals. On the battlefield, women chose to follow the army, acting as laundresses and nurses while also increasing the morale of the soldiers. Other women even fought for their country as soldiers and Molly Pitchers. The variety of sentiments and actions taken by these women contributed to revolutionary efforts, as well as the political and economic separation from Britain.

Throughout the war, women utilized communication networks to share their political ideas and identities with each other. Before the revolution, women wrote to each other to stay in touch with friends and relatives, but once the revolution began, these communication networks became a way to express their political sentiments to others who shared their opinions. Elite women such as Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, and Hannah Winthrop wrote to each other “Laying [their] Political heads together” to discuss issues of British tyranny and the tactics employed by the British army during the war.¹⁸⁵ Esther Deberdt Reed created a personal relationship with George and Martha Washington, increasing her family’s social and political standing, as well as using the wives of patriot Congress members in Philadelphia to undertake a

¹⁸⁵ Hannah Winthrop to Mercy Otis Warren, July 8, 1776, microfilm, in *Winthrop, Hannah F. (d. 1790). Correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren, 1752-1789 [bulk dates 1752-1782]* (Washington Crossing, PA: David Library of the American Revolution).

fundraising effort to benefit the Continental army.¹⁸⁶ Phillis Wheatley similarly cultivated a support network through her masters which allowed her poetry to be published throughout the colonies, as well as in England.¹⁸⁷ The shared communication networks allowed for the political sentiments of these women to be shared to a broader audience, as well as reinforcing revolutionary political ideas and rhetoric.

Women participated in spinning bees, a politically and economically important act, which led to homespun being considered as a physical representation of republicanism. With taxation acts being imposed on the colonies, many people refused to import or purchase British goods, especially silk and lace which represented extravagance, imperialism, and corruption of England.¹⁸⁸ With patriots refusing to purchase British cloth, women stepped up to produce domestic alternatives, which were made of simpler materials, such as wool and flax rather than British lace and silk.¹⁸⁹ Patriots who opposed British imperialism wore homespun, politicizing the fabric and turning homespun into a physical representation of republicanism. Women were not only responsible for creating this new republican style, but they also wore homespun themselves, expressing themselves as patriotic republicans.

During the war, women organized fundraising campaigns to help provision the Continental Army. Esther Deberdt Reed and the Ladies Association in Philadelphia meticulously planned an entire campaign, even publishing and sharing their plan with other female voluntary

¹⁸⁶ Owen S. Ireland, *Sentiments of a British-American Woman: Esther Deberdt Reed and the American Revolution* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017), 180-182.

¹⁸⁷ Gary B. Nash, *Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 139.

¹⁸⁸ Ben Marsh, "The Republic's New Clothes: Making Silk in the Antebellum United States," *Agricultural History* 86, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 208.

¹⁸⁹ Marsh, "Republic's New Clothes", 208.

organizations so the fundraiser could be repeated in other states.¹⁹⁰ Reed's campaign in Philadelphia began with the publication of a broadside titled *Sentiments of an American Woman* which defined women as citizens and implored women to support the Continental Army as part of their civic duty to protect their communities and their nation.¹⁹¹ These female voluntary organizations successfully called upon patriotic women to act in order to support their country and the revolutionary war effort.

On the homefront, some women organized food riots against selfish, unpatriotic merchants. Due to wartime inflation necessary food items became scarce and expensive, so when some merchants chose to hoard certain goods to increase their profit, which reminded women of corrupt monarchical practices.¹⁹² In order to restore virtue in their communities, and provide for themselves and their families, women marched on the merchant's warehouses, seized the hoarded goods, and sold them back to the community at fair prices.¹⁹³ Food rioters often punished the 'Loyalist' merchants, for violating the public trust and acting in self-serving ways, corrupt ways which were exactly what patriot soldiers were fighting against.

Other women directly contributed to the war effort by following the army or acting as soldiers on the battlefield. Camp followers chose to leave their familiar environment in order to follow the army, providing essential services to the soldiers.¹⁹⁴ By acting as laundry women, nurses, and sutlers, camp followers were easing some of the burdens of the soldiers and demonstrating their support for the revolutionary war effort. Some of the camp followers were

¹⁹⁰ Ireland, *Sentiments*, 183.

¹⁹¹ Ireland, *Sentiments*, 190.

¹⁹² Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 235.

¹⁹³ "The Female Food Riots of the American Revolution," *New England Historical Society*, last modified 2019, <http://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/the-female-food-riots-of-the-american-revolution/>.

¹⁹⁴ Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America's Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 52.

responsible for bringing water to soldiers on the battlefield to help cool and clean the cannons.¹⁹⁵ These women, known as “Molly Pitchers,” would occasionally step up and help operate a cannon if one of the soldiers was unable to. Other women, like Deborah Sampson, disguised themselves as men and enlisted as soldiers, proving themselves to be dedicated and capable soldiers.¹⁹⁶ Women chose to support the Continental Army in a variety of ways, but no matter how they chose to support the army, these women were expressing their patriotic loyalties.

Patriotic women became involved in a variety of ways during the American Revolution, and their efforts helped support the independence movement. By looking at communication networks, the homespun movement and fundraising campaigns, and fighting women one can better understand the political contributions that women made to the revolution. Women’s variety of experiences largely depended on their locations, such as homefront or battlefield, and their socioeconomic status. Communication networks were largely controlled by elite, educated women on the homefront. However, women of all social standings chose to contribute to the homespun movement and the fundraising campaigns. While wealthy women tended to organize philanthropic efforts, they received donations from rich and poor women alike towards the war effort.¹⁹⁷ While poorer women tended to disguise themselves as soldiers, or acted as Molly Pitchers, women of all social classes followed the Continental Army. Officers’ wives, such as Martha Washington, performing certain chores and boosting the morale of soldiers, just as the middle- or lower-class women were doing. Moving forward, historians should consider how the

¹⁹⁵ Claire R. Williams, “More than a Housewife: Revolutionary Era Women in War,” (MadRush Conference: Spring 2014), 15.

¹⁹⁶ Williams, “More than a Housewife,” 14.

¹⁹⁷ Ireland, *Esther Deberdt Reed*, 183.

political rhetoric and tactics used during the revolution translated into the years of the early republic once America had finished fighting for its independence.

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