

Abigail Adams: 'Remember the Ladies'

Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776



Abigail Adams (1744–1818)

1. Historical Context

In the spring of 1776, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John Adams, who was serving in the Continental Congress. Patriots were denouncing arbitrary power and demanding government based on consent. Abigail used that same revolutionary language to ask whether those principles should also apply to women within marriage and law.

2. Selections from the Letter

“I long to hear that you have declared an independency; and by the way, in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors.”

“Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If 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.”

3. Commentary

1. **Adams redirected revolutionary language.** Patriots attacked tyranny in Parliament and the empire; Abigail Adams asked why similar arguments could not be applied inside the household.
2. **She linked liberty to representation.** Her words echo the colonial complaint against laws imposed without consent, but she applied that logic to women.
3. **This letter was not a full modern feminist manifesto,** but it exposed a major contradiction: how could Americans denounce arbitrary power while preserving male authority over wives?

4. Think Like a Historian

Question: If colonists rejected arbitrary power in government, what reasons might they have given for preserving male authority within the household?