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An Observation of Women during American Revolution:  
The Organization of Society  
Abigail Adams and Eliza Pinckney

By

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Throughout history, women have been accustomed to a subservient status to males, from marriage to professional careers. The women were given a role of childrearing, internal domestic servitude, and being accountable to their spouses. One could also apply the barefoot and pregnant theory to the last three hundred plus years. This status was a deficient standard or pattern for women not only in America, but also throughout the world. Generally there were no schools or education courses for women during the 1700's. For women, education was taught in the home and most of it dealt with the domestic role of women, such as how to serve tea, the proper use of utensils, the skill of sewing, and the principles of entertainment. It was a woman's role to maintain a social and religious order for the family, community, and nation. Most women believed the same issues as men, such as property, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness but were encourage by society to be demur or modest. There were two women during this time period that set examples and gave American women a view that was different from what society had structured. Those two women, Abigail Adams and Eliza Pinckney added to the political structure and economic strength of a new nation.

Some ladies became serious and developed a deep commitment to the organization of society, the liberation of a new people, and individualism. Abigail Adams and Eliza Pinckney were extremely affected by the American Revolution. Adams and Pinckney made efforts toward individualism by giving examples from their personal lives in the new nation. They made significant contributions toward the Revolution

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creating a new idea and direction for the role of women. The following contributions that Adams and Pinckney made will be addressed in this paper:

\*How these two ladies from different regions induced the suggestions of equalization for women.

\*How they supported and helped the new nation lean toward individualism.

Abigail Smith Adams was born in Weymouth, Massachusetts. Her father was a Congregationalist minister. Abigail had no former education but was a self-taught, life-long learner. Abigail read Shakespeare and Pope, and taught herself French. Abigail was a self-taught woman. Mrs. Adams was married to John Adams, the second President of United States. Abigail Adams was the first Lady of the United States from 1797 – 1801. According to Natalie S. Bober, author of Abigail Adams Witness to a Revolution, Abigail gave birth to five children, whereas one of them, John Q. Adams, became the sixth United States President.

According to Women of Colonial and Revolution by Harriett Horry Ravenel, Eliza Pinckney was born in the West Indies but moved to Charles Town as a young girl. Eliza attended school in England. She studied French, music, and visiting, which was what women were to study at that time. At the age of sixteen, Eliza Pinckney was put in charge of running three of her father's Charles Town plantations. Her father was a British military officer and was ordered to return to the Caribbean, leaving Eliza in charge.

Eliza Pinckney was an outstanding botanist who experimented with flax, hemp, and silk. Eliza found a market for Indigo and used her skills in perfecting this product. Indigo was to become South Carolina's second best cash crop. The European textile

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industries clearly wanted and needed this color dye for its fabrics. Eliza encouraged all the surrounding plantation owners to make this a chief product. "In Carolina it really took the people by surprise... its rice and indigo paid magnificently, aided by the British "bounty;" its staple commodities bought all it needed... The agricultural daughter and commercial mother lived in mutual helpfulness." (Ravenel p.248). Eliza enjoyed great success in the agricultural business, which also made her very wealthy. She was also in the position of choosing her own husband. Usually the upper class that had wealth, education and power would dictate to whom the women should marry and most of the time it was into a similar upper class family. Eliza did choose another planter and lawyer, Charles Pinckney. He did not live long and Eliza became a widow.

Both ladies had more education than most women of that time. Eliza and Abigail came from wealthy families and were probably considered to be in the upper class of society. Both women were adequate in running a plantation at a young age.

Abigail was adequate in maintaining the plantation while her husband, John, was working as a judge. Abigail was efficient in her duties so much so that John left the running of the plantation in her hands. Abigail became very efficient in letter writing due to the fact John was away from home most of the time. He had been appointed Minister to the Court of St. James, which had them moving to London from 1785 until 1788. Abigail wrote John about the trip to England, "Women you know Sir are consider as Domestick Beings and although they inherit an equal Share of curiosity with the other Sex, yet but few are hardy eno' to venture abroad, and explore the amazing variety of distant Lands" (Butterfield. p. 51).

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Abigail Adams and Eliza Pinckney were both devoted to their families. They were fortunate in the choosing of their husbands. They enhanced a man's values in political and economical needs. When John Adams became President in 1797, Abigail was on top of her duties. Abigail had given birth to five children and learned to tolerate the dictatorship of the nobility. Abigail kept abreast to their station in life and knew how to entertain in a formal fashion (Noble Women of Early America). Eliza was also devoted to her family and their education. The progressive education she gave her sons enabled them to play major roles in the American Revolution and in the government of the newly formed United States of America. They were at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Charles Pinckney signed the United States Constitution and Thomas Pinckney was the United States Minister to Spain and Great Britain.

Abigail Adams and Eliza Pinckney were also very strong in their opinions about the role of women, liberation, and individualism. These ladies induced equalization for women by setting examples in a society they did not believe in individualism. Abigail supported John in his convictions that slavery was evil and a threat to American democratic future. She even went as far as enrolling a black child into school with a defense that he was a free man. Abigail stated, "Just because his face is black, education should not be withheld." (Noble Women of Early America). Because of the role that Abigail had been given, she believed that she should stand up for this black person but also still believed that women should be self-taught. Abigail stated, "They (women) should educate themselves and be recognized for their intellectual capabilities, for their ability to shoulder responsibilities of managing household, family, and financial affairs, and for their capacity morally to guide and influence the lives of their children and

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husbands”. Abigail defended her views on slavery but denied that women should have the same education as males. Going back to the time, Abigail was as liberated as her role in society permitted. She had purchased a book for her niece, and decided to read it before it was sent off. The book must have raised her eyebrows as it implied that women were subservient to the male world. Abigail stated, “I will never consent to have our sex considered in an inferior point of light. Let each planet shine in their own orbit. God and nature designed it so –if man is Lord, woman is Lordess – that is what I content for ”(Bober, p. 192). She was indeed observing and creating a society of liberation and individualism.

Eliza Pinckney taught her slaves to read and write. She had plans to create a school for them; however, it never came to pass. Eliza never questioned the institution of slavery because all her profits were made from slave labor and ingenuity. She had read John Locke’s theories, but never made the connections with slavery. The story of indigo cultivation helps to illustrate how the new nation was indebted to the slave economy. Mrs. Pinckney wrote to her daughter telling her about the petition to the King of England, “It was signed by twenty-nine Americans, fifteen of whom were Carolinians” (Ravenel p. 252). The Revolution was coming and she knew it. Eliza had subscribed to the “tabula rasa” theories of John Locke, where a person’s mind at birth is thought to be like a blank slate upon which personal experiences create an impression. Eliza agreed with the principles, rights, and the sense of wrongs of Mr. Locke.

Some women like Abigail and Eliza set the examples those women were not subservient to anyone. Women were not lesser beings, whose role in society was only to give birth until one died or just to take care of children. Women were no longer property

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of their husbands but more of a partner or individual. Abigail summed it up the best with the statement, “ –if man is Lord, woman is Lordess – that is what I content for ” (Bober, p. 192). She was indeed observing and creating a society of liberation and individualism. Social liberation and individualism was executed and witnessed by Mrs. Abigail Adams and Mrs. Eliza Pinckney. Both ladies practiced what they believed, which are a liberating movement in itself. Both ladies had a different approach to the creating of a new nation. They were the creators as they set examples for others to model. They express their opinions and observed the change of a new government. These two ladies were liberating individuals because they thought for themselves, express their opinions, earned their own money, and applied their own ideas to get the results. Abigail had more connections but appeared to hold back from issues concerning women’s rights, whereas Eliza created a better example by having a successful career without the influence of wealthy people. Abigail Adams and Eliza Pinckney were excellent examples of a change in the organization of society, and the liberation and individualization of women.

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Reference:

Abigail Smith Adams. (2006). Notable Women of Early America – Archiving Early America. <http://www.earlyamerica.com>

Bober, Natalie S. (1994). Abigail Adams Witness to a Revolution. Simon and Schuster Publishing Division. New York. New York.

Butterfield, L. H., Friedlander, Marc. & Kline, Mary Jo. (1975). The Book of Abigail and John: Selected letters of the Adams Family 1762- 1784. Massachusetts Historical Society.

Ravenel, Harriett Horry. Women of Colonial and Revolutionary Times. McClung Museum.



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Title: United States History

Vital Theme of the Unit: Women of the Revolutionary War

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Grade Level: **seven and eight**

**Number of Lesson in Unit: Three**

Under the guideline of Curriculum Standards Approved by the Tennessee State Board of Education, on August 31, 2001 – eighth grade Standards, learning expectation and draft performance indicators.

**Curriculum standards addressed – list:** 4.01 Appreciate the development of people's need to organize themselves into a system of governance.

4.02 Recognize the purposes and structure of governments.4.03 Understand the relationship between a place's physical, political, and cultural characteristics and the type of government that emerges from that relationship.4.04 Discuss how cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control resources, rights, and privileges.4.05 Understand the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of citizens living in a democratic society.4.06 Understand the role the Constitution of the United States plays in the lives of Americans.8.4.spi.4. Recognize the rights and responsibilities of individuals throughout the development of the United States.8.4.spi.5. Identify how conditions, actions, and motivations contributed to conflict and cooperation between states, regions and nations. Recognize how a right must be interpreted to balance individual rights with the need for order (i.e., freedom of speech, freedom of religion, trial by jury);

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**Technology used:** research-using Internet - the political issues and problems that affect the United States during the Revolutionary War and its relation with Women,

Library: local and school.

Textbook and Primary Sources

United States History

Lesson Plan: **Have you ever wondered what women did during the beginnings of the Revolution and how their lives changed? Wives, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers impacted the War both at home and on the battlefield. Their lives changed in many ways with the onset of the protest of the Revolutionary War. In what ways did they change? Your job is to become an expert on the changes the women experienced in their lives during the Revolution War using the following: library, textbooks, magazine articles and internet:**

**The purpose of the exhibit is to educate visitors about life during the Post - Revolution War. Your group will become experts on the Revolution War by researching the lives of upper class and lower class of people, soldiers, children and the role women rights during the War. As the expert on women in the Revolutionary War, you will explain and research the roles of women during the time period. The child's role, you will recreate letters that children wrote during the War so that visitors can learn of the hardships they faced.**

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**Objectives:**

Students will identify events that led to the American Revolution.

Students will describe the emotions and sentiment that led to the American Revolution

Student will be able to:

Discuss colonial America and why the colonies sought independence from Britain.

What were the positive things about being ruled by a far-away government?  
What were the negative things?

What did the British government do that angered the colonists?

Were the colonists reasonable to want independence from Britain?

**ACTIVITIES AND PROCEDURES:** On an overhead transparency, board, or worksheet introduces the activity to the students. The following is an example of an overhead of student activities for one day on the Internet.

Here are the rules:

1. Treat your computer kindly.
2. Bring paper and pencil in order to take notes as you look for information that relates to the subject, write down the Internet addresses. Look for the important facts/clues.

**Procedures:** Discuss colonial American and why the colonies sought independence from Great Britain.

**Make two lists of the positive / negative items from breaking off with Great Britain. What would be the benefits for the women during this time period? Children?**

**Make two lists of the colonist reasons for wanting to be independence and one from Great Britain point of view. From a males and female prospective!**

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**Create a mock trial with the Colonists on one side and Great Britain on the other. Can there be a compromise to this situation? Have students take turns debating these issues. Example: What is wrong with adding a little tax to help pay for those entire soldier fighting the Indians to keep the colonists safe. What is wrong with only trading with the English? Are the Colonists getting a fair price?**

**Have students write letters to the King explaining what the Colonist's want.**

**Have the students bring in cups and let them make a little tea.**

**Have the students create definitions using the following terms:**

Colony, Freedom, Liberty, Monarchy, Representative, Tax, Pursuit of Happiness, Revolution, legislative, sovereign, absolute, King George, unjust, undue, embroiled, and the cause of liberty.

Lesson two:

**Goal:** Many students see history as a necessary evil, a needed and boring requirement for graduation, uninteresting, and sometimes a waste of time. History does not have to be any one of these for anyone. Under the guild lines of the State of Tennessee. Curriculum standards. 8.1.tpi.11. Chart the perspectives of various cultural groups in American History regarding social, economic, and political ideas. 8.6.tpi.3. classify examples of stereotypes, prejudices, conformity, and altruism. 5.18 Recognize the causes, course, and consequences of the Civil War.5.19 Identify the contributions of African Americans from slavery to Reconstruction

**PURPOSE:** This activity is designed to allow each student to look at woman's perspective on historical events. This activity will be continuances during a term; I like to use it the first or second term, as on going term paper more like a quest to see what the next female character accomplished. It helps the student to continue research an historical event, I allow them to choose any female character/event they find interesting, and write about that female character/event or series of professions in such a way that it will become very personalized for them.

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**OBJECTIVES:** The activity will allow the students to:

1. Plan, write, and edit an original personified history story that relates to females during the revolutionary war.
2. Research a female character with an historical event that interests the student.
3. Write a research paper in a manner that cannot be copied text. (Student will use own words).
4. Prepare the students to become knowledgeable in a specific area.
5. Help prepare A.P. students for essay questions by giving them outside sources of reference.
6. Provide for the students an experience that can be fun, challenging, and memorable. (not boring).

**RESOURCES/MATERIALS:** Imagination, reference books, imagination, willingness to try something new, imagination, previous examples, imagination, desire to enjoy history .

### **Read example to students:**

**Warren, Mercy Otis (1728-1814)** Born on Cape Cod, Mercy Otis moved a few miles north to Plymouth when she married; she never saw anything beyond eastern Massachusetts -- but the life of her mind was so rich that she was respected by the most cosmopolitan and politically important men of her era. Though her brothers attended Harvard, she (like most girls in her era) got only the education that she picked up for herself. Naturally political, she involved herself from girlhood in the conversations of her father and her older brother James, a well-connected lawyer. That she waited to wed until age twenty-six showed something of her independent nature, but she married James Warren in 1754. While he developed a career in the colonial legislature, she went on to bear five sons

**Abigail Adams:** November 11, 1744 in Weymouth, Massachusetts Abigail Adams was the second child of four children born to Reverend William and Elizabeth Quincy Smith. She married John Adams in 1764 at the age of twenty. The couple had two daughters and three sons: one daughter died in infancy; John Quincy, Charles and Thomas Boylston. Their family home was in Braintree, Massachusetts. Much of her education was gained while living with her grandmother, Mrs. John Quincy, in Mount Wollaston. Mrs. Adams cared for her children at their Braintree home while her husband was an accomplished lawyer. With the American Revolution, she was left largely alone for ten years to run their household. She joined her diplomat husband in Europe in 1784 where they spent eight months in Paris and three years in London. They returned to the United States in 1788 where John Adams served as vice president and president. Abigail spent equal time at the capital and at her family home. In reviewing her letters from her husband's political life, she shows her commitment to politics and her Federalist beliefs. Even though she suffered through periods of serious illness, she was known as a personable and pleasant

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individual. After the presidency, she was happy to return to Braintree and resume farming and caring for her family. She died at home of typhoid fever.



### Lesson three

**Objectives:** Discuss the shared values between the United States and Great Britain.

**Analyze political painting of the Boston Massacre. Write a paragraph summarizing what would be correct in the painting only after the trial accounts have been read.**

**Materials:** Primary source of the painting of the Boston Massacre. Computer printer out of trail.

**Procedure:** Review the ways in which historians learn about the past. Ask students what tools historians use. Answers may include the following.

- Physical remains, such as bones
- Government documents, such as the Declaration of Independence
- Paintings of a special event.
- Eyewitness accounts, such as trail records and autobiographies
- Historical documents, such as newspaper stories events and illustrations

Explain that students are going to examine political painting from the time of the American Revolution. Remember as to who painted the picture and what was their point of view. Surely no Englishmen would put the British soldiers in such a bad role. Were their any women during this event? What did they think? Make a new painting or drawing about the Boston Massacre and it should only have women in the work. What would they have doing, wearing or protesting?

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<b>Display</b>	<b>Excellent 4</b>	<b>Good 3</b>	<b>Satisfactory 2</b>	<b>Needs Improvement 1</b>	<b>Score</b>
<p>Role # 1: Women During the Revolutionary War</p>	<p>descriptions exceed minimum requirement of 1/2 page in length. Illustrations are included. All information included is relevant.</p>	<p>descriptions meet minimum requirement of 1/2 page in length. Illustrations are included. All information included is relevant.</p>	<p>descriptions lack relevant information, however, they do meet minimum length requirement of 1/2 page. Illustrations are included.</p>	<p>descriptions do not meet 1/2 page minimum requirement and / or illustrations are not included.</p>	
<p>Role # 2: Revolutionary</p>	<p>Letters exceed minimum requirement of one page in length.</p>	<p>Letters meet minimum requirement of one page in length. Pictures are</p>	<p>Letters lack relevant information, however, they do meet minimum</p>	<p>Letters do not meet one page minimum requirement and / or illustrations</p>	

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War Letters	Pictures are included. All information included is relevant.	included. All information included is relevant.	length requirement of one page. Illustrations are included.	are not included.	
Information Included on Display  Trail of the Boston Massacre	Display includes a thorough introduction, which captures audience's attention. Also, each role as well the importance of each role to the Revolutionary War is clearly described.	Display includes an introduction, which captures audience's attention. Also, each role as well the importance of each role to the Revolutionary War is described.	Display includes an introduction. Also, each role as well the importance of each role to the Revolutionary War is described. However, information is lacking.	Display is incomplete. It is missing either an introduction or information regarding each role and its importance to the Revolutionary.	
Organization and Attractiveness	The display is attractive and well organized. The items are neatly and securely attached to the display.	The display is attractive and well organized. The items are neatly and securely attached to the display.	The display is somewhat organized.	The display is unorganized and hard to follow.	
Labels	Each item has a small, neat label describing the item. If the item was created by someone other than the student, credit to the source is neatly given on the display.	Each item has a label describing the item. Credit is given to the source who created the item if it is someone other than the student.	Each item has a label, but some lack-required information.	One or more items are not labeled.	



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<b>Group Work</b>	<b>Excellent</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Good</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b> <b>1</b>	<b>Score</b>
Contributions to Project	Each student can clearly state and explain their contributions to the project.	Each student can somewhat state and explain their contributions to the project.	Each student can state their contributions to the project, but not clearly explain how it is relative.	Not all students are able to state their contributions to the project.	
Time-Management	All students in-group managed class time effectively when working on project.	Students somewhat managed class time effectively when working on project.	Students rarely managed class time effectively when working on project.	Class time was used ineffectively when working on project.	
Quality of Work	Based on each student's contributions, the work presented by each is of the highest quality.	Based on each student's contributions, the work presented by each is quality.	Based on each student's contributions, the work presented is somewhat quality.	Based on each student's contributions, the work presented is not quality.	
Working with Others	Students always listened to and shared with each other. Support to the efforts of others was given.	Students usually listened to and shared with each other. Support to the efforts of others was given.	Students somewhat listened to and shared with each other. Support to the efforts of others was given.	Students rarely listened to and shared with each other. Support to the efforts of others was seldom given.	

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<b>Presentation</b>	<b>Excellent</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Good</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Needs Improvement</b> <b>1</b>	<b>Score</b>
Preparedness	Students are completely prepared and have obviously rehearsed.	Students seem pretty prepared but needed couple more rehearsals.	The students are somewhat prepared, but it is clear that rehearsal is lacking.	Students do not seem at all prepared to present.	
Understanding of Material	Students show full understanding of the topic.	Students show a good understanding of the topic.	Students show a good understanding of parts of the topic.	Students do not seem to understand the topic very well.	
Presentation  Content	Presentation includes a thorough introduction. Each student clearly explains what he / she learned about his / her role and each student explains why each his / her is important to the Revolutionary War.	Presentation includes an introduction. Each student briefly shares what he learned about his role. Each student shares the importance of the Revolutionary War to his / her role.	Presentation is lacking information regarding either an introduction, information on each role, and / or the importance of each role to the Revolutionary War. Presentation would be stronger with more information.	Presentation is incomplete in that one of the following has been left out: an introduction, information on each role, and / or the importance of any role to the Revolutionary War.	
Enthusiasm	Facial expressions and body language generate a strong interest about the topic in others.	Facial expressions and body language somewhat help to generate an interest about the topic in others.	Facial expressions and body language are used however, seem not genuine.	Very little use of facial expressions or body language. Did not generate much interest in the topic being presented.	