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Imagining a New Nation: Patriotism and National Identity in the Writing of Late-18th Century American Women

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Imagining a New Nation: Patriotism and National Identity in
the Writing of Late-18th Century American Women

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Department of History

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By

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INTRODUCTION

Benedict Anderson defined the nation as “an imagined political community” that is “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”¹ The research for this paper began with a desire to know how American women in the time leading up to, during, and immediately after the American Revolution and War of Independence did or did not imagine themselves as members of the newly emerging political community eventually known as the United States of America. As tensions between the Colonies and Great Britain increased, as tea was dumped in Boston harbor, and as independence was declared in 1776, how did women make sense of these events and their significance for their own identities? As many colonists began to reject their previous identity as British subjects and colonial residents in favor of a new civic identity as members of a separate, sovereign nation, they needed to define what it meant to be American. Who was an American citizen? What did it mean to be an American citizen? What was it that bound the disparate thirteen colonies and their diverse populations together into one cohesive nation? Where were the limits to this newly imagined community, and did these limits include or exclude women?

The process of building the new American nation--not just physically or in terms of government, but mentally and emotionally in the minds of the inhabitants of the colonies--did not happen overnight. It was a process that many different groups and individuals sought to gain control over as by defining who was, and perhaps even more importantly, *was not*, a member of the American nation, power could be gained or lost, consolidated or dispersed. The task of

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

unifying the nation was something that many political leaders at the time felt urgently. As Peter Coviello pointed out, the signers of the Declaration of Independence faced the problem “[...] of how to declare independence on behalf of a nation, when that nation does not properly exist, as a nation, prior to its declared independence.”² This awareness that the Colonies’ unity was not only fragile but vital can be seen going back to Benjamin Franklin’s 1754 “Join or Die” political cartoon. In this cartoon, Franklin urged the British colonies to unite against the French and Native Americans in the French and Indian War or perish.³ This message of “Join or Die” continued to ring true to patriot leaders as war broke out with Great Britain. If the people of the thirteen colonies could not envision themselves as members of an American nation to which they had duties and responsibilities, how could they expect to defeat the British in the war, let alone maintain order after the war was over and suddenly one of the few things most colonists had in common--an identity as British colonial subjects--was gone?

The processes and struggles of building the new American nation were illuminated in the debates over changing conceptions of patriotism during this time. Patriotism had traditionally been defined as a distinctly masculine public virtue based on dispassionate reason and logic.⁴ In *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Gordon S. Wood defined the ideology and patriotism that was “embraced by Americans of varying political persuasions and at every social level,” as “the ideology of Whig radicalism” which “was grounded in the best, most enlightened knowledge of the eighteenth century [...]”⁵ Women--because of their exclusion from property

² Peter Coviello, “Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America”, *Early American Literature* 37, no. 3 (2002): 449.

³ Benjamin Franklin, “Join or Die,” Illustration, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 9, 1754. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog. <http://loc.gov/pictures/item/2002695523/> (accessed April 9, 2021).

⁴ Coviello, “Agonizing Affection,” 440.

⁵ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 32.

ownership, supposed greater emotionality, and inability to detach themselves from their immediate surroundings to embrace the abstract concept of the nation--were considered incapable of patriotic virtue.⁶ By denying women the capability to comprehend “enlightened knowledge,” and possess patriotic virtue, men were able to deny them civic identities as members of the nation with the associated rights and duties. However, by the time tensions between the Colonies and Great Britain were increasing in the 1760’s and 1770’s, this definition of patriotism was being challenged. White male colonists appropriated patriotism and enlightenment rhetoric to argue for their own political rights, as did others who had long been denied political rights and recognition as members of the civic body such as white women and free and enslaved African-Americans.

This paper argues that American women actively contributed to the building of a national image for the emerging United States as they engaged in the redefinition of patriotism and enlightened debates over citizenship, natural rights, slavery, and other such subjects in their writing, interactions with each other, and their daily lived experiences. This argument shows that the important intellectual work of nation building did not just occur at the elite level of society among wealthy enfranchised men who monopolized political and governing power for themselves. The construction and definition of the American nation was not something that was imposed on the diverse inhabitants of the country solely from the top down. It also occurred in regular people’s daily lives as they navigated the rapidly changing world around them and sought to make sense of their position in their families, communities, and country. The cases study technique allows deeper analysis of these themes than the scatter shot approach using more women in less depth. Furthermore, much of the scholarship on the development of American

⁶ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 35.

patriotism and national identity has focused on men's published political writing, while this paper seeks to analyze women's personal and public writings as a location for their "declarations and self-definitions," in order to understand how they constructed their own national identities.⁷

The first chapter will use Abigail Adams's letters to other women from 1773-1787 to examine how she asserted American women's claims to the traditionally masculine virtues of patriotism and civic duty, as well as how she contributed to the construction of a gendered American national identity. As an unusually well-educated woman and the wife of a patriot political leader, Adams was deeply immersed in the politics of her day. Adams was also well-connected with other politically-minded women such as Mercy Otis Warren and Catharine Macaulay with whom she corresponded and discussed issues of patriotism, nationhood, and natural rights.

Chapter two will use the poetry and other writings of Phillis Wheatley to explore how Wheatley claimed an American national identity and advocated for the cause of independence despite her double exclusion from the national body--that is, the group of people who are considered to be members of the nation--as a formerly enslaved black woman. Wheatley utilized the patriotic rhetoric of freedom and metaphorical slavery employed by white Americans to not only incorporate African-Americans into the body of the emerging American nation, but to also make powerful arguments for the abolition of slavery. Wheatley's example provides a contrast to the white exclusivity of Adams's patriotism and conception of the nation and illuminates how issues of slavery and racism deeply impacted debates about patriotism and national identity in the late 18th century.

⁷ Kacy Tillman, "Constructing Female Loyalism(s) in the Delaware Valley: Quaker Women Writers of the American Revolution," in *The Consequences of Loyalism: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Calhoon*, ed. Rebecca Brannon and Joseph S. Moore (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 48.

The final chapter will use the diary of the Quaker Sarah Logan Fisher to examine a loyalist woman's perspective on the war and revolutionary rhetoric espoused by patriots like Adams and Wheatley, as well as how Logan positioned herself in relation to her fellow loyalists, her patriot neighbors, and the American and British armies. Fisher's vision of America rejected patriots from the national body as treasonous subjects, and her perspective reminds the modern scholar how complicated and messy national identities and loyalties were during the War of Independence.

While Wood's work on the ideology of the Revolution and formation of the nation examined elite and middle-class white American men's understanding of civic virtue, patriotism, and the reasons for the Revolution, he treated American patriotic thought as a homogenous whole. His analysis did not center the perspectives and experiences of women or African-Americans. The focus of this paper also differs from previous scholarship on American women's patriotism, such as Linda Kerber's work on Republican Motherhood. While under the concept of Republican Motherhood white women were recognized as having a civic duty as mothers to the next generation of male patriots, it ultimately worked to exclude women from the public world of politics.⁸ When taken in combination with the increasing prevalence of separate spheres rhetoric, Republican Motherhood emphasized women's proper place within the home and their innate differences from men. This paper's analysis of the writing of Adams, Wheatley, and Fisher shows that these women did not just connect themselves to the nation solely through their domestic roles as mothers and wives. Instead, these women frequently imagined themselves as full members of the national body and actively contributed to the development of patriotic

⁸ See Linda Kerber's "Daughters of Columbia: Educating Women for the Republic, 1787-1805," and "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment--An American Perspective," in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 23-62.

rhetoric in revolutionary ways as they argued for women's education, greater legal rights, the abolition of slavery, and religious freedom.

CHAPTER ONE

“Were I a man I must be in the Feild”: The Gendering of Patriotic Virtue and National Identity in the Letters of Abigail Adams

On August 14, 1777, Abigail Adams wrote a letter to her friend, Mercy Otis Warren, marking the twelfth anniversary of the Stamp Act Riots in Boston and reflecting on all the American colonists had “endured” and “suffer’d” in their fight for independence up to that point.⁹ Towards the end of this letter, Adams stated, “Were I a man I must be in the Feild. I could not live to endure the Thought of my Habitation desolated, my children Butchered, and I an inactive Spectator.”¹⁰ Here, Adams very clearly identified the proper role and actions to be taken by a patriotic man: he was to take up arms and actively defend his home, his children, and his country from aggressors. But what was the proper role and actions to be taken by a patriotic woman, such as Adams herself? Could a woman even truly be considered a patriot?

In this chapter, I will use Adams's letters to other women from 1773-1787 to examine how she asserted American women’s claims to the traditionally masculine virtues of patriotism and civic duty, as well as how she contributed to the construction of a gendered American national identity. Adams’s assertions of female patriotic virtue in her letters written during the American War of Independence predate the increased public debate surrounding questions of women’s rights in the U.S. during the late 1780’s and 1790’s. It was during this later period that Linda Kerber posited the development of Republican Motherhood which, while it acknowledged

⁹ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, August 14, 1777, letter, in *Abigail Adams: Letters*, ed. Edith Gelles (New York: The Library of America, 2016), 125.

¹⁰ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, August 14, 1777, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 125.

that women did have a political function as the mothers of future citizens, also stressed their proper place within the home and excluded women from voting and holding office.¹¹ When Adams wrote about her own feelings of patriotism and appropriated the masculine language of civic duty during the War of Independence, any questions of women's rights were generally sidelined by male patriots and few women spoke publicly about the topic.¹² Adams's letters from this time reveal the early development of her thinking and the roots of Republican Motherhood during a formative and tumultuous time when nothing was certain in the emerging nation--not even the role of women--and individuals grappled with the ambiguities and possibilities of revolutionary rhetoric.

When comparing the letters Adams wrote while in Massachusetts during the war to those she wrote after joining her husband, John Adams, overseas in England and France in 1784, a tension between her earlier use of masculine patriotic rhetoric and calls for women's greater legal rights and her treatment of European women emerges. The letters written abroad and sent to her female friends and relatives back home contained frequent criticisms of European women for being too present in public spaces and too masculine, which initially seems to contradict the progressive view of women present in her earlier letters. This apparent contradiction reveals how Adams's conception of a female American national identity was predicated on a careful balancing of claims for greater rights with the maintenance of restrictive gender roles, as well as constructed in opposition to her understanding of 'corrupt' European national identities.

¹¹ See Linda Kerber's "Daughters of Columbia: Educating Women for the Republic, 1787-1805," and "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment--An American Perspective," in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 23-62.

¹² Rosemarie Zagarri, "American Women's Rights Before Seneca Falls," in *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 668.

Adams's ability to engage in intellectual debates over patriotism and women's role in society can be traced back to her early life and education. Adams was born on November 22, 1744 in Weymouth, Massachusetts to the Reverend William Smith and Elizabeth Quincy Smith, both of whom were members of prominent Massachusetts families and descendants of many of the colony's founders.¹³ While she did not receive a formal education, Adams was tutored at home--mostly by her mother--learning domestic skills, religious instruction, reading, writing, some arithmetic, and rudimentary French. Additionally, Adams was allowed to read freely from her father's library, which exposed her to popular religious texts and secular works of history and literature that other women of similar status would likely have been unfamiliar with.¹⁴ In 1764 at the age of twenty Abigail married John Adams, future signer of the Declaration of Independence, diplomat, and second president of the United States.¹⁵ Throughout her life, both through her husband and through her own relationships with the women around her, Adams would be deeply engaged with the political and enlightened issues of her day, as evidenced by her extensive correspondence.

Adams's claiming of traditionally masculine patriotic virtue for women was one part of her broader belief in women's intellectual equality with men, their right to education, and their right to take part in political conversations. In 1773, Adams wrote a letter to Mercy Otis Warren after the older woman had "[requested] a correspondence," with her.¹⁶ Similar to Adams, Warren was a Massachusetts woman who had obtained an unusually thorough education, receiving

¹³ Edith Gelles, "Chronology," in *Abigail Adams: Letters*, ed. Edith Gelles (New York: The Library of America, 2016), 959.

¹⁴ Gelles, "Chronology," in *Abigail Adams*, 959.

¹⁵ Gelles, "Chronology," in *Abigail Adams*, 961.

¹⁶ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, July 16, 1774, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 19.

lessons in history, geography, philosophy, and ancient Greek and Roman classics.¹⁷ Warren was also surrounded by politics; her brother James Otis, Jr. argued the famous “Writs of Assistance” case in 1760 and was an early proponent of American independence. Her husband, James Warren, was an ardent patriot and would go on to be a prominent anti-federalist.¹⁸ By the time of Adams's first letter to her, Warren had published her first political satiric play *The Adulateur* criticizing Thomas Hutchinson, the British Royal Governor of Massachusetts.¹⁹ In beginning a correspondence with Warren, Adams had the opportunity to engage in serious intellectual discourse with a woman she admired and who shared her opinions about women’s intellectual equality with men.

When Adams was disappointed with her husband’s dismissive response to her urging him to “Remember the Ladies,” as he and other male politicians formulated a “new Code of Laws,” she expressed her frustration to Warren.²⁰ Adams wrote, “as all Men of Delicacy and Sentiment are averse to Exercising the power they possess, yet as there is a natural propensity in Humane Nature to domination” it would only be logical to “put it out of the power of the Arbitrary and tyrannick to injure us with impunity by Establishing some Laws in our favor upon just and Liberal principals.”²¹ In this passage, Adams demonstrated her grasp of the enlightened rhetoric and political aims espoused by male politicians who justified the colonists' rebellion against Britain: those who wielded absolute power, such as monarchs, were predisposed to tyranny, and the freedom of the populace could only be secured through establishing just laws and government

¹⁷ Jeffrey H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris, introduction to *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), xii.

¹⁸ Rosemarie Zagari, "Warren, Mercy Otis (1728-1814)," in *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of the American Enlightenment*, ed. Mark Spencer (Bloomsbury, 2014), https://hollins.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/bloome/warren_mercy_otis_1728_1814/0?institutionId=2601.

¹⁹ Zagari, "Warren, Mercy Otis (1728-1814)."

²⁰ Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 92.

²¹ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, April 27, 1776, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 94.

that would combat this natural tendency. Adams substituted the tyrannical King George III for the American husband with complete legal authority over his wife and argued that the Revolution should apply to women and their deprivation of liberty as well. While her husband dismissed her grievances, her correspondence with Warren provided a receptive space where she could further explore and develop arguments for increased legal rights for women without public or social condemnation.

In addition to discussing political affairs, the two women also loaned each other popular literary and philosophical works and discussed them in their letters. In one 1780 letter to Warren, Adams expressed a vehement dislike of Lord Chesterfield and his *Letters to His Son*, lambasting him as “a Hypocritical, polished Libertine,” and taking particular offense to “his abuse upon our sex.”²² Adams’s willingness to critique Lord Chesterfield demonstrates how she considered herself qualified to engage in this typically male-dominated discourse, at least within the confines of her friendship with Warren where she did not need to fear censure for overstepping the bounds of femininity. While Adams did not put forward her own voice in publication, she was supportive of Warren’s work and justified her use of political satire despite its possible incompatibility with “that Benevolence which ought always to be predominant in a female character.”²³ In assuring Warren that she was not violating any rules regarding proper behavior for women by writing and publishing political satire, Adams was contending more broadly that women not only could form opinions on serious topics such as politics, but that there was a place in the public and traditionally masculine world of print for their voices.

In line with her beliefs that women possessed the same intellectual capacity as men and deserved greater legal protection from male tyranny, Adams claimed the traditionally masculine

²² Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, February 18, 1780, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 167.

²³ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, February 3, 1775, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 42.

virtues of patriotism and civic duty for women. In the late 18th century, definitions of patriotism and civic duty were contested, reassessed, and redefined across the Atlantic world. William Russell's *Essay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women in Different Ages. Enlarged from the French of M. Thomas* (1773) illustrates how women were conventionally viewed as too "susceptible of friendship, of love, of pity, of benevolence to individuals," to "elevate themselves to that patriotism, or disinterested love of one's country, which embraces all its citizens."²⁴ Because women were seen as unable to abstract themselves from their feminine selves and immediate surroundings--and because women could not vote or hold public office--their "relationship to their nation seemed to be secondhand," and only experienced through the intermediary of their male relatives.²⁵

This conception of patriotism did not go unchallenged. According to Kate Davies, oppositional Whigs and radicals in England saw public masculinity as threatened by "the very national institutional spaces where it was supposed to be preserved," as "political culture [...] generate[d] a range of emasculating dependencies."²⁶ These Whigs and radicals questioned whether "masculine virtue, in the republican terms that had been used to define it, might still represent a viable goal in itself."²⁷ This crisis of faith even lurked underneath Russell's essay. Immediately after deeming women wholly incapable of patriotism, he fretted over how "this boasted virtue is almost always a composition of pride and selfishness, generated by the ideas of interest and property," among the men of his day.²⁸ The ambivalence around patriotism in the

²⁴ William Russell, "Section V. of the Comparative Merit of the Sexes," in *Essay on the Character, Manners, and Genius of Women in Different Ages. Enlarged from the French of M. Thomas* (London: G. Robinson, 1773), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N10774.0001.001/1:8.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>, 33.

²⁵ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 35.

²⁶ Kate Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren: The Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45.

²⁷ Kate Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren*, 45.

²⁸ William Russell, "Section V. of the Comparative Merit of the Sexes," in *Essay on the Character*, 34.

late 18th century opened up possibilities for alternate definitions that included--or even favored--women, and the repercussions of this reevaluation was felt on both sides of the Atlantic.

Looking specifically at America during and immediately after the War of Independence, the split between more traditional understandings of patriotism as the domain of elite white men and divergent definitions can be seen. Benjamin Franklin provided an example of the ideal republican statesmen in his *Autobiography*, characterizing himself as a man and as “at all times conduct[ing] himself with supreme coolness and detachment,” and “allow[ing] none of the vexations of personal animosity or affection to trouble his civic deportment.”²⁹ Just as women were disqualified from being true patriots by Russell for their overly strong attachments to their environments and inability to comprehend the abstract over the particular, so too were women disqualified from being true patriots by Franklin’s definition. Running counter to the emotionless detachment of Franklin’s ideal statesman was a patriotism and civic identity in which “a capacity for impassioned response and relation to the world was [...] a veritable prerequisite.”³⁰ Peter Coviello has identified this emotional patriotism to varying degrees in the writings of both Phillis Wheatley and Thomas Jefferson. I argue that a similar patriotism based on feelings of shared suffering and responsibility pervaded Adams's letters to other women, and this mode of patriotism opened up an alternative path for women to claim patriotic virtue and the right to political participation.

Instead of using “supreme coolness and detachment” as the basis for patriotism, Adams turned to emotions that transcended an individual’s sex. In 1773 while criticizing the effects of the Tea Act, Adams wrote to Warren, “You Madam are so sincere a Lover of your Country, and

²⁹ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, as quoted in Peter Coviello, “Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America”, *Early American Literature* 37, no. 3 (2002): 440-441.

³⁰ Coviello, “Agonizing Affection”, 443.

so Hearty a mourner in all her misfortunes that it will greatly aggravate your anxiety to hear how much she is oppressed and insulted.”³¹ Through deriding the British tea as “that bainfull weed” and describing how the citizens of Boston were “Spirited and firm” in their conviction to prevent the tea from being brought ashore, Adams demonstrated how she and Warren were both attuned to political events in Boston.³² In characterizing Warren as “so Hearty a mourner” for her country, Adams focused on the emotion of patriotism in a way that was accessible to women as mourning relied on universal feelings of sympathy and loss. Additionally, since women were deemed more “susceptible of friendship, of love, of pity, of benevolence to individuals,” by many 18th century male thinkers, such emotional patriotism would have been even more readily accessible to women.³³ The adjective “Hearty”, though, suggested an amount of strength and vigor in Warren’s mourning that was not the fainting weakness of a woman overcome by emotion, but instead the masculine grief of a man called to action. By defining a patriot as someone who felt for their country, Adams offered an alternative to definitions such as Russell’s and Franklin’s that excluded women from the virtue of patriotism because their inability to vote or hold public office prevented them from “attach[ing] themselves to the state.”³⁴ Instead, the prerequisite for patriotism was the ability to emotionally attach oneself to one’s fellow citizens and country, an ability--at least theoretically--seen as universal to both women and men.

A 1777 letter to Warren further illustrates the importance of feeling and suffering to Adams's patriotism. Adams wrote, “[...] when I bring Home to my own Dwelling these tragical Scenes which are every week presented in the publick papers to us, and only in Idea realize them, my whole Soul is distress’d. Were I a man I must be in the Feild. I could not live to endure

³¹ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, December 5, 1773, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 25.

³² Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, December 5, 1773, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 25.

³³ William Russell, “Section V. of the Comparative Merit of the Sexes,” in *Essay on the Character*, 33.

³⁴ William Russell, “Section V. of the Comparative Merit of the Sexes,” in *Essay on the Character*, 33.

the Thought of my Habitation desolated, my children Butchered, and I an inactive Spectator.”³⁵

Adams presented reading the newspaper’s accounts of battles and skirmishes not as a passive act, but as an active process where the horrors of the war were brought into the home and experienced by women such as Adams as if they had been present for them. While Adams acknowledged the gendered difference of patriotic duties, the patriotism she presented in these lines is one of emotional suffering rooted in visions of domestic destruction and maternal suffering. No, she was not a man and so she did not directly fight the British as a soldier, but that did not preclude her from sharing in the suffering of her nation.

It is also important to keep in mind that the war was not only something Adams and other women read about, but something they experienced directly in many ways. Leading up to the siege of Boston in 1775, Adams wrote to her husband of “Soldiers comeing in [to their house] for lodging, for Breakfast, for Supper, for Drink &c. &c. Sometimes refugees from Boston tierd and fatigued, seek an assilum for a Day or Night, a week.”³⁶ Beyond just bringing the war metaphorically into the home through reading and sharing news in newspapers and letters, the movements of British and American troops, loyalist and patriot refugees, and the very real destruction of many families’ homes meant that the home front did not exist in an isolated bubble. They may not have been soldiers “in the Feild”, but for American women the war was a part of their daily lives. This breakdown of the perceived division between the domestic lives of women and the public lives of men also undermined the idea expressed by many enlightened theorists that women only experienced their relationship to their country secondhand through the experiences of their husbands, sons, and brothers.

³⁵ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, August 14, 1777, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 125.

³⁶ Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 24, 1775, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 46.

A letter Adams wrote in 1774 to the British Whig historian Catharine Macaulay demonstrates how Adams saw herself as just as ardent a patriot as her husband or any other American man even before war broke out in the Colonies. This letter carried a serious, if informal, diplomatic purpose of creating abroad an image of America as a strong nation and gaining more allies among British Whigs as tensions in the Colonies increased. In the first paragraph of this letter, Adams praised Macaulay for being an ally to the “cause of America” and wrote, “we consider it as a struggle from which we shall obtain a release from our present bondage by an ample redress of our Grievances--or a redress by the Sword. The only alternative which every american thinks of is Liberty or Death.”³⁷ Despite the vast divide between patriots and loyalists in the American Colonies at this time--as recognized by Adams in letters to Warren where she complained about men’s “restless ambition” which had “broken [the American] people into factions³⁸--here Adams spoke of Americans as a single, collective “we.” In doing so, she projected an image of unified national strength that both reassured allies like Macaulay and warned those hostile to the “cause of America” who may have also seen the letter. Additionally, in writing “we”, Adams made no distinction between male and female patriots. Instead, the greatness of their cause and the passion of Americans across the colonies seemingly subsumed such divisions as gender, further creating an image of America as a cohesive nation.

To further accomplish her goal of gaining allies among British Whigs, Adams made connections between the means of protest employed by American patriots and those used by dissenters in Britain. Adams wrote, “[...] it was formerly the pride and ambition of Americans to indulge in the fashions and Manufactures of Great Brittain now she threatens us with her chains we will scorn to wear her livery, and shall think ourselves more decently attired in the coarse and

³⁷ Abigail Adams to Catharine Macaulay, November-December, 1774, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 38.

³⁸ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, February 25, 1774, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 29.

plain vestures of our own Manufactory than in all the gaudy trappings that adorn the slave.”³⁹ In this passage, Adams referenced the boycott campaigns being organized in the American Colonies against imported British goods to protest the Intolerable Acts.⁴⁰ In calling attention to this means of political protest, Adams connected the efforts of Americans--particularly American women--to a means of protest that had been advocated by the Protestant Anglo-Irish community beginning in the late 17th century as they concerned themselves with the status and legislative independence of the Irish parliament. The boycott had also gained popularity among British men and women with the founding of the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufacture, and Commerce in 1754.⁴¹

In discussions surrounding the boycotting of imported goods, Anglo-Irish Protestants, British Whigs, and American patriots all rhetorically linked the corruption of the political order, the consumption of imported luxury goods, and female virtue. Just as Irish patriots upheld a woman trading her French silks or British cloth for coarser Irish-manufactured cloth as the paragon of feminine virtue, American patriots like Adams denigrated the importation of British cloth and fashion as the attire of a “slave” and the result of “pride and ambition.”⁴² Instead, Adams praised the “coarse and plain vestures of [American] Manufactory,” as the proper clothing of the free patriot.⁴³ While Adams did not write of the boycott in gendered terms, the buying of cloth and sewing of clothes were the domestic responsibilities of women. In not describing the boycott as a particularly feminine act of protest, Adams again indicated that patriotic feeling and actions transcended the traditional divisions between men and women and

³⁹ Abigail Adams to Catharine Macaulay, November-December, 1774, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 39.

⁴⁰ Mary O’Dowd, “Politics, Patriotism, and Women in Ireland, Britain and Colonial America, c. 1700-1780,” *Journal of Women’s History* 22, no. 4 (2010): 29.

⁴¹ O’Dowd, “Politics, Patriotism, and Women,” 17, 24.

⁴² O’Dowd, “Politics, Patriotism, and Women,” 19.

⁴³ Abigail Adams to Catharine Macaulay, November-December, 1774, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 39.

united both sexes together in their love for their country. The construction Adams set up in this quote between a corrupt and materialistic England and a simple and virtuous America would be a theme she would revisit throughout her letters, especially when she was abroad in England and France.

In 1784 after the signing of the Treaty of Paris brought about the end of the War of Independence, Adams sailed to London to join her husband John, who had been abroad as a diplomat for the previous six years. After reuniting in London, the Adamses spent the next nine months in Paris as John negotiated treaties of amity and commerce with various European states before he was appointed the first American minister to Great Britain and the family returned to London until 1788.⁴⁴ When comparing the letters Adams wrote during the War of Independence to those she wrote while abroad, a tension emerges between her earlier claims of patriotism for American women and urging of her husband to “Remember the Ladies,” and her characterization of European women as too masculine. This contradiction reveals how Adams enforced and used patriarchal gender norms for women to construct comparative national images of the newly born United States and European countries. These later letters were also written during a time when the common enemy and imminent threat of the British that had been present during the war was no longer around to overcome all the differences among the diverse inhabitants of the new nation.

While abroad, Adams wrote many long diary-like letters to her sister Mary Smith Cranch back home in Massachusetts, frequently detailing the differences between life in America and wherever she was at the time. In one letter to Cranch after just having arrived in London in 1784, Adams wrote,

⁴⁴ Gelles, “Chronology,” in *Abigail Adams*, 972-973.

They paint here, near as much as in France, but with more art, the head dress disfigures them in the Eye of an American. I have seen many Ladies; but not one Elegant one since I came; there is not the neatness in their appearance which you see in our Ladies. The American Ladies are much admired here by the Gentlemen, [...] O my Country; my Country; preserve; preserve the little purity and simplicity of manners you yet possess. [...] The softness peculiarly characteristick of our sex and which is so pleasing to the Gentlemen, is Wholly laid aside here; for the Masculine attire and Manners of Amazonians.⁴⁵

In this passage, Adams used the physical appearance of women and fashion as tangible manifestations of a nation's merit and relative virtue. While British women 'disfigured' themselves with artificial cosmetics, wigs, and unnecessary frills, American women were pure and virtuous in their simplicity. While being overly concerned with one's physical appearance and fashion would typically have been considered a feminine trait, Adams characterized British women as "Masculine [...] Amazonians."⁴⁶ This was a frequent criticism of Adams, as she also described the Countess of Effingham as "a good person, tho a little masculine," before expanding on this critique in a later letter: "[Lady Effingham] like all the rest of English Ladies [...] is destitute of that Softness & those feminine graces which appear so lovely in the females of America. I attribute this in a great measure to their constant intercourse at publick places."⁴⁷ Adams's censure of English ladies as overly masculine had less to do with their actual physical appearance and more to do with what she saw as an unfeminine boldness in public spaces and mixed company.

While in France, Adams wrote negatively of almost every French woman she met, generally characterizing them as promiscuous and unfeminine, with the exception of Madame de la Fayette. About her, Adams wrote, "[...] Her high Rank and family have not made her like most others forget either the Maternal or Domestick Character. [...] I am happier says she and I have

⁴⁵ Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, July 23, 1784, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 290.

⁴⁶ Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, June 24, 1785, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 357.

⁴⁷ Abigail Adams to Mary Smith Cranch, July 16, 1787, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 433.

more reason to be so than many others of my sex and country. They seek their pleasures in dissipation and amusement, [...] and they have no resource in Domestick Life.”⁴⁸ To Adams, the exception of Madame de la Fayette proved the rule of her general opinion of French women. Adams also linked aristocracy--which she viewed as a uniquely European phenomenon--with being a bad mother and lacking in proper feminine domestic virtues. Linking being a bad mother to “High Rank” carried the implication that American women did not as often fall into the trap of “dissipation and amusement” that French women were so prone to given the lack of “Rank” in the U.S. In setting American and French women up as opposites, Adams was also setting the United States and France up as opposites, with the U.S. representing the virtue and fulfillment of natural gender roles that came with democracy, and France representing the degeneracy and perversion of gender roles that came with corrupt monarchy.

This condemnation of European women for transgressing into public spaces and neglecting their proper feminine ‘softness’ stands in contrast to the seemingly more progressive claims Adams made for women in earlier letters. In 1775, Adams had praised Warren’s political writings and saw no issue in her publishing them.⁴⁹ If Adams’s treatment of American women and European women was consistent, she should have either condemned Warren’s transgression into the masculine world of political writing or admired the Countess of Effingham’s own boldness in public and traditionally masculine spaces. Adams’s progressive claims for women did not simply stop after the War of Independence either as if she had changed her mind about women’s rights or capabilities. In 1787 while in London, Adams attended five public lectures on “Electricity, Magnetism, Hydrostatics optics pemematticks,” and bemoaned how “American

⁴⁸ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, May 10, 1785, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 350.

⁴⁹ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, February 3, 1775, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 42.

Females” did not have access to such learning back home.⁵⁰ To her niece in this letter, Adams wrote, “Yet surely as rational Beings, our reason might with propriety receive the highest possible cultivation.”⁵¹ If Adams still believed in women’s equal intellectual capacity with men and had not gone back on any of her assertions regarding their right to greater recognition as citizens, what motivated her harsh treatment of European women?

The contrast between Adams's general treatment of European women in her letters and her more progressive claims for women’s intellectual equality and improved legal status reveal both the ambivalence Adams's felt at times in navigating issues of women’s rights, as well as her focus on constructing an American national image. Throughout her life, Adams struggled to balance traditional gender norms with her vision for women’s improved status in society. She praised Warren for publishing her political pieces and admired her strength in writing, but acknowledged that many saw such behavior as “incomptable with the Benevolence which ought always to be predominant in a female character,” and never published any of her own writing.⁵² Adams balanced these conflicting impulses by rigidly conforming to--and insisting the women around her conformed to--the physical appearance of traditional femininity to mitigate the subversive nature of her claims for women’s rights. Adams was also concerned with constructing an image of the newly independent United States as virtuous and superior to its former mother country and European countries in general, which came out in her repeated condemnations of the women she met while abroad.

⁵⁰ Abigail Adams to Lucy Cranch, April 26, 1787, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 420.

⁵¹ Abigail Adams to Lucy Cranch, April 26, 1787, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 420.

⁵² Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, February 3, 1775, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 42.

CHAPTER TWO

“And can I then but pray/ Others may never feel tyrannic sway?”: Phillis Wheatley’s

Incorporation of Black Americans into the Nation

The absence of any discussion of actual chattel slavery as it existed in the U.S. during the time of the Revolution or contemplation of the place of free and enslaved African-Americans in the nation stands out in Adams’s articulation of patriotism and national identity. While she challenged the exclusively masculine prerogative of patriotism, Adams’s image of the American patriot and of the nation as a whole was decidedly white. Through contrasting Adams’s writing with that of the black American poet Phillis Wheatley and examining how Wheatley’s constructions of patriotism and the nation were much more radical in their calls for racial equality, we can recover another facet of the intense debates surrounding the topics of natural rights, citizenship, and slavery that took place during the turmoil of the Revolution.

Many of Wheatley’s poems contained strong patriotic messages referencing the American colonies’ ongoing conflict with England. In these poems, Wheatley frequently used a singular American ‘We’ to represent the colonists, including herself among the patriots and identifying with their cause. In her 1768 poem “To the KING’S Most Excellent Majesty”, Wheatley asked, “But how shall we the *British* king reward!/ Rule thou in peace, our father, and our lord!”⁵³ Wheatley’s authorial voice in this poem spoke as a British subject and as an American colonist thankful to King George III for the repeal of the Stamp Act. By writing “we” and “our”, Wheatley made no distinction between herself, an enslaved black woman, and free

⁵³ Phillis Wheatley, “To the KING’S Most Excellent Majesty, 1768,” in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, ed. Vincent Carretta (Penguin Books: New York, 2001), 12.

white Americans, but instead spoke for all and identified with America's emerging national struggle.

In this chapter, I seek to explore how Wheatley claimed an American national identity and advocated for the cause of American independence when the society around her was fundamentally built on white supremacy and the enslavement of black individuals. By harnessing the patriotic rhetoric of freedom and metaphorical slavery touted by white Americans and paying particular attention to the emotional and religious facets of this rhetoric, Wheatley not only incorporated black Americans into the body of the emerging American nation but also made powerful arguments for the abolition of slavery. Wheatley's assumption of an American identity was not a given, however. Not only did she have to fight against the prevailing racist attitudes of white Americans, but her precarious position as a woman of color even after she was free meant this was neither an easy or obvious claim for Wheatley to make like it was for Adams.

In 1761, a seven or eight-year-old girl was enslaved somewhere in West Africa and forced to endure the horrors of the Middle Passage. This particular voyage was especially brutal as 21 of the 96 newly enslaved Africans died on their forced journey across the Atlantic--a mortality rate of almost 25 percent and twice the average death rate of the Middle Passage.⁵⁴ Upon arrival in Boston, this child was sold to John and Susanna Wheatley who renamed her Phillis after the very slave ship that had carried her away from whatever home, family, and community she belonged to previously.⁵⁵ John's primary occupation was that of a successful tailor, but he was also a merchant, substantial property owner, and Boston official.⁵⁶ Wheatley

⁵⁴ Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (The University of Georgia Press: Athens, 2011), 7.

⁵⁵ Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings* (Penguin Books: New York, 2001), xiii.

⁵⁶ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 16.

became one of a few African-Americans enslaved by John and Susanna who taught her to read and write English, as well as Classical literature, geography, history, the Bible, and some Latin.⁵⁷

Wheatley occupied an ambiguous position in John and Susanna's household that was different from that experienced by the majority of enslaved Africans who were brought to the Americas to labor on the plantations of the West Indies and the American South. In his biography of Wheatley, Vincent Carretta emphasized the distinction between "a *society with slaves*, where the economy was not based on slavery," such as New England, and "a *slave society* [...] where the economy depended on slave labor."⁵⁸ However, New England's prosperity depended on its trade with the West Indies--a slave society--and so "the two different kinds of slave societies were actually regional economies bound up with each other."⁵⁹ Carretta made the distinction between slavery in New England and other places to call attention to the particular circumstances Wheatley had to navigate and the particular opportunities that would have been available to her to express her agency as she attempted to forge her own identity.

It is important to understand that while slavery in New England was different from slavery in the South, enslaved African-Americans in New England were still legally considered to be property that could be bought and sold entirely at the discretion of their enslavers. As Catherine Adams and Elizabeth H. Pleck explained, "Everywhere slaves understood their condition as dispossession, being robbed of their families, their protectors, and their home place; [...] All slaves were objects of trade, exchange, and value, commodities listed in an estate inventory next to the horses and the cattle."⁶⁰ Examinations of the differences between New

⁵⁷ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, xiii-xiv.

⁵⁸ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 15.

⁵⁹ Catherine Adams and Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Love of Freedom: Black Women in Colonial and Revolutionary New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 30.

⁶⁰ Adams and Pleck, *Love of Freedom*, 4.

England and Southern slavery should not--and must not--be misused to downplay the oppression inflicted on black Americans by white New England enslavers. Where slavery differed between New England and the South was in the specific experiences and opportunities available to enslaved people in each location. In New England, free and enslaved African-Americans were not legally denied “the rights to be baptized, to marry, and to learn to read,” though their ability to claim these rights was largely contingent upon what their enslavers allowed or what means they had to circumvent the authority of their enslavers.⁶¹ For example, Chloe Spear, an African-born woman like Wheatley who was also enslaved in Boston, was physically threatened by her enslaver when he found her teaching herself to read with a condensed version of the Bible.⁶² The education Wheatley received while enslaved by John and Susanna was rare for a black woman in New England, but it likely would have been impossible if she were enslaved in the South.

The smaller population of enslaved African-Americans in New England also did not mean that white New Englanders were free of deeply racist beliefs or did not seek to maintain their power over enslaved people. On October 28, 1768, when Wheatley was fourteen or fifteen years-old, Boston officials were gripped with fear over rumors regarding a supposed slave conspiracy and imposed a 9 o'clock curfew on all African-Americans in the city.⁶³ Clearly, regardless of the differing circumstances and environments, slavery was still slavery, and white Bostonians knew that those they tried to deny the full humanity of did not happily accept their enslavement. While Wheatley's relationship with Susanna was complex and described by Wheatley in familial terms in a letter to her friend Obour Tanner upon Susanna's death, the fact

⁶¹ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 15.

⁶² Adams and Pleck, *Love of Freedom*, 81.

⁶³ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 19.

that she was enslaved by Susanna cannot be overlooked.⁶⁴ Wheatley herself certainly did not overlook this fact as she repeatedly denounced slavery in her poetry and letters and likely played an active part in negotiating for her own freedom. Again, as Adams and Pleck stressed, “[...] good treatment of New England slaves is [...] a powerful myth that has to be seen for what it is, a form of denial of the reality of property ownership in human beings.”⁶⁵

On December 21, 1767, Wheatley published her first poem “On Messrs. Hussey and Coffin” in the newspaper the *Newport Mercury*, though a subscription proposal for a collected volume of her poems indicates she was known for writing poetry as early as 1765.⁶⁶ After publishing her elegy “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. GEORGE WHITEFIELD, 1770” as a broadside, Wheatley sent a copy of the poem to a patron of Whitefield’s, the Countess of Huntingdon.⁶⁷ This began the process that would bring her to London where her first and only collected volume of poetry *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* was published in 1773.⁶⁸ Due to the *Somerset v. Stewart* case of 1772 in which Lord Mansfield ruled that an enslaved person brought to England could not be forced to return to the colonies, enslaved persons on English soil could effectively emancipate themselves by flight.⁶⁹

Given how widely discussed the Mansfield Judgement was in colonial newspapers and the fact that Granville Sharp--one of the first white British campaigners against the slave trade who was also directly involved in the *Somerset* case--was Wheatley’s primary tour guide in London, it is likely Wheatley was well aware of the opportunity for self-emancipation traveling

⁶⁴ Phillis Wheatley to Obour Tanner, March 21, 1774, letter, in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 153-154.

⁶⁵ Adams and Pleck, *Love of Freedom*, 29.

⁶⁶ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, xiv.

⁶⁷ G.J. Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom: History Poetry, and the Ideals of the American Revolution* (New York University Press: New York, 2018), 65.

⁶⁸ Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom*, 103.

⁶⁹ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 121.

to England presented.⁷⁰ Vincent Carretta argues that because of this evidence and the fact that Wheatley was emancipated almost immediately upon her return to Massachusetts, Wheatley likely actively negotiated for her freedom from Nathaniel Wheatley in return for agreeing to return to Boston with him.⁷¹ Viewed with all of this in mind, Wheatley's return to Boston can also be understood as an intentional embracing of an American identity.

Upon examining Wheatley's extant poems, one notices how many of them are elegies for both famous and influential figures, as well as for people from Wheatley's community she personally knew. In total, fourteen of the thirty-eight poems in her first book of poetry and at least nine of the thirty-three proposed poems for her unpublished second book were elegies. Writing elegies was not just a means for Wheatley to break into the business of writing and publishing poems--though it certainly was an effective strategy. Many of her elegies blended collective mourning with patriotic rhetoric to forge a unified sense of national identity that was accessible to all Americans, whether white or black, free or enslaved, male or female. Wheatley's elegies tapped into the ideological framing of civic bonds in familial terms and the conception of patriotism as the expression of emotional bonds to one's community and nation that Adams also employed in her letters. As Coviello argued, during the revolutionary and early national days of the United States, "a capacity for impassioned response and relation to the world," became not a threat to the nation, but "a veritable prerequisite for virtuous citizenship," and a means of creating a sense of "present-tense unity and deeply felt coherence," for the young country.⁷²

⁷⁰ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 118, 120, 128.

⁷¹ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 137.

⁷² Coviello, "Agonizing Affection," 443.

Wheatley's use of heightened emotion and collective mourning in her elegies were examples of this "impassioned response", and for Wheatley, this emotional national identity and patriotism were also intertwined with her religious and anti-slavery beliefs. In the beginning of "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. GEORGE WHITEFIELD, 1770", Wheatley wrote, "Unhappy we the setting sun deplore,/ So glorious once, but ah! it shines no more," setting up the poem as an embodiment of the collective mourning of all Americans who listened to and admired the preaching of Whitefield.⁷³ Whitefield was perceived by many American colonists as a friend to their cause, and in the last letter he wrote before his death, he expressed sympathy for the residents of Massachusetts when the British government sought to retract their charter.⁷⁴ By publishing an elegy to Whitefield in Boston where patriotic sentiment was especially high, Wheatley aligned herself with the patriot's cause and counted herself among those who considered Whitefield an ally in the fight against British tyranny.

Wheatley also used this rhetorical strategy in an unpublished elegy for Dr. Samuel Cooper, asking,

"WHAT deep-felt sorrow in each *Kindred* breast/ With keen sensation rends the heart distress'd!/ *Fraternal* love sustains a tenderer part,/ And mourns a BROTHER with a BROTHER'S heart."⁷⁵

In this poem, a community's mourning for a prominent citizen created a sense of unity, transforming purely civic bonds into close familial relationships. While Adams also linked mourning and patriotic devotion when she wrote to Warren, "You Madam are so sincere a Lover of your Country, and so Hearty a mourner in all her misfortunes that it will greatly aggravate

⁷³ Wheatley, "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. GEORGE WHITEFIELD, 1770," in *Phyllis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 15.

⁷⁴ Carretta, *Phyllis Wheatley: Biography*, 74.

⁷⁵ Wheatley, "O THOU whose exit wraps in boundless woe," in *Phyllis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 100.

your anxiety to hear how much she is oppressed and insulted,”⁷⁶ Wheatley’s elegies carried more radical implications for African-Americans who were denied not only their political rights but also their humanity as well. If such collective mourning and shared emotion could transcend other divisions in American society, why not perceived racial divisions as well?

Thomas Jefferson’s treatment of African-Americans and Wheatley specifically in *Notes on the State of Virginia* exemplifies conventional white thought at the time that denied black Americans the ability to feel on the same level as white Americans. In *Notes*, Jefferson stated,

“Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry.--Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately; but it could not produce a poet.”⁷⁷

Jefferson not only minimized the suffering endured by African-Americans under slavery--earlier in this paragraph claiming, “Their griefs are transient,”--but also denied African-Americans the ability to love deeply and form close bonds.⁷⁸ Through this denial of African-Americans’ emotional capacity, Jefferson justified their enslavement and asserted their “fundamental [...] incapacity for civic virtue.”⁷⁹ He answered the question, “If such collective mourning and shared emotion could transcend other divisions in American society, why not perceived racial divisions as well?”, by denying black Americans’ emotional capacity and thereby avoiding having to properly answer the question. Jefferson reduced Wheatley’s literary abilities and bold claims in her poetry to shallow observations of the senses and the superstition of religion. In short, in

⁷⁶ Abigail Adams to Mercy Otis Warren, December 5, 1773, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 25.

⁷⁷ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 140.

⁷⁸ Jefferson, *Notes on the State*, 139.

⁷⁹ Coviello, “Agonizing Affection,” 447.

Jefferson's mind, the radical claims for racial equality and freedom in Wheatley's poetry could be ignored instead of taken seriously.

Wheatley demonstrated African-Americans' ability to suffer and feel grief in her poems in order to prove their qualifications for civic virtue and access the emotional patriotism that could transcend perceived racial differences between black and white Americans. In her poem dedicated to the Earl of Dartmouth, Wheatley addressed questions the Earl and other white readers may have had regarding where her "love of *Freedom*" and "wishes for the common good,/ By feeling hearts alone best understood," had come from by tracing them back to the "pangs excruciating" and "sorrows" her parents in Africa endured when their daughter was stolen from them.⁸⁰ In this single stanza, Wheatley both refuted racist claims like Jefferson's that Africans were incapable of true grief and love, and directly linked her parent's capacity for noble and pure suffering to her own love of freedom and ability to care for the needs of all. A petition by enslaved African-Americans to the governor of Massachusetts in 1774 also made claims to black Americans' ability to form familial attachments and suffer at the forced breaking of these relationships by slavery. The signers of this petition stated, "But we were unjustly dragged by the cruel hand of power from our dearest frinds and sum of us stolen from the bosoms of our tender Parents [...]."⁸¹ Not only were those enslaved and Africans in general capable of familial attachment and love, but slavery's unnatural denial of these bonds was further evidence of its cruelty and inhumanity.

Wheatley concluded this stanza of her poem to the Earl with the lines,

⁸⁰ Wheatley, "To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c," in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 40.

⁸¹ *Slaves' Appeal to Thomas Gage, Royal Governor of Massachusetts, May 25, 1774*, Petition, from Fordham University, *Modern History Sourcebook*, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1774slavesappeal.asp>. (accessed March 2, 2021).

“Steel’d was that soul and by no misery mov’d/ That from a father seiz’d his babe
below’d/ [...] And can I then but pray/ Others may never feel tyrannic sway?”⁸²

Here, Wheatley flipped the stereotype used to dehumanize African-Americans and instead contended it was the white enslavers who were incapable of sympathy and care for the welfare of others, thus denying them the true love of freedom and civic virtue. Through this rhetorical strategy, Wheatley demonstrated her awareness of the contradiction inherent in white Americans’ use of the metaphor of slavery and claims to liberty only to continue to hold African-Americans in actual bondage. Adams herself employed this common white rhetoric in her letter to Catharine Macaulay when she bemoaned “the chains of Slavery” imposed upon (white) Americans by the British.⁸³ In her elegy “On the Death of General Wooster”, Wheatley directly drew attention to this contradiction, asking how colonists could “hope to find/ Divine acceptance with th’ Almighty mind” while continuing to “hold in bondage Afric’s blameless race?”⁸⁴ Here, Wheatley not only pointed out the hypocrisy of white slave-owning patriots, but also warned them that they would face divine punishment for their duplicity.

Similar to her use of African-Americans’ emotional capacity, Wheatley also used religion as a unifying force in her poetry and to condemn slavery. For many enslaved black Americans in New England, Christianity--specifically evangelical Protestantism--became a powerful subversive tool to both provide those enslaved with hope and to make arguments against slavery.⁸⁵ The evangelical Christianity stemming from the First Great Awakening of the 1740s

⁸² Wheatley, “To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH, His Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c,” in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 40.

⁸³ Abigail Adams to Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay, November-December, 1774, letter, in *Abigail Adams*, 38.

⁸⁴ Wheatley, “On the Death of General Wooster,” in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 93.

⁸⁵ Adams and Pleck, *Love of Freedom*, 81.

contained increasingly democratic elements and an emphasis on emotion in both preachers and believers.⁸⁶ In Whitefield's elegy, Wheatley implored her readers,

“Take him [God] my dear *Americans*, [...] / Be your complaints on his kind bosom laid: / Take him, ye *Africans*, he longs for you, / *Impartial Savior* is his title due: [...] You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to God.”⁸⁷

These lines, depicting a single universal God for all who was impartial on matters of race, tied in with the overall unifying message of the poem. The final line of this excerpt declaring that all would be “sons, and kings, and priests to God,” is similar to a line in Wheatley's poem “On being brought from AFRICA to AMERICA”. In this work, Wheatley warned her white readers, “Some view our sable race with scornful eye, / [...] Remember, *Christians, Negroes*, black as *Cain*, / May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.”⁸⁸ Just as the ability to mourn and emotionally connect to others in one's community and nation overcame differences among Americans in disparate parts of the country, so too did Wheatley's Christianity negate perceived racial differences and foreshadow a coming equality. As James A. Levernier suggested in his reading of Whitefield's elegy, “Abolition, [Wheatley] implies, like American independence, will come in due time,” regardless of what white Americans may have wanted.⁸⁹

In his biography of Wheatley, Carretta puts forward an even more subversive reading of these lines. Carretta suggests that instead of reading them as “Remember, *Christians*, [that] *Negroes*, black as *Cain*, / may be refin'd, and join th' angelic train,” they may be read as “Remember [that] *Christians, Negroes*, black as *Cain*, / may be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.”⁹⁰ While still associating blackness and sin, the second reading emphasizes a metaphorical

⁸⁶ Adams and Pleck, *Love of Freedom*, 85.

⁸⁷ Wheatley, “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. GEORGE,” in *Phyllis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 16.

⁸⁸ Wheatley, “On being brought from AFRICA to AMERICA,” in *Phyllis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 13.

⁸⁹ James A. Levernier, “Phillis Wheatley and the New England Clergy,” *Early American Literature* 26, no. 1 (1991): 32.

⁹⁰ Carretta, *Phyllis Wheatley: Biography*, 64.

rather than literal understanding of blackness and suggests that those of European descent “could be as black with sin as anyone else.”⁹¹ This equally plausible reading stresses the ability of religion and salvation to transcend any perceived differences between individuals and further shows how Wheatley used religion as a unifying and equalizing force in her poetry.

Acknowledging the two alternate readings of the ending couplet of “On being brought from AFRICA to AMERICA,” reminds us that writers have often used the ambiguity of poetry to convey multiple, layered meanings and hide subversive statements that might have been otherwise censored or suppressed at the time. It is through recognizing both of these possible readings that we acknowledge Wheatley’s careful and deliberate construction of her poems. To only accept the most obvious interpretations of her work and reject the multitude of complicated meanings present in her writings does Wheatley, her intelligence, and her agency a grave disservice.

In examining Wheatley’s life, writing, and her alignment of herself with the Americans against the British, it is also important to acknowledge that this was not an easy or obvious choice for Wheatley--or any African-Americans, free or enslaved--to make. While Adams did not display any uncertainty about which side to align herself with or any doubt that she was an American patriot in her letters, for black Americans there was a lot more riding on their choice of sides--including their literal freedom. Additionally, there were more constraints on black Americans' ability to choose an American or a British national identity. As previously discussed, when she traveled to England in 1773 to oversee the publishing of her book, Wheatley theoretically had the option of refusing to return to America and instead embracing a British identity, but she did not.

⁹¹ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 65.

Many free and enslaved African-Americans during the Revolutionary period did side with the British. In 1775, Virginia's British governor John Murray, fourth Earl of Dunmore, proclaimed that all enslaved African-Americans who joined the British and bore arms against the rebelling colonists would gain their freedom. Within a year, thousands of enslaved people took him up on that offer.⁹² But siding with the British was not a guarantee of freedom, let alone of political or social equality. At the end of the war when the British evacuated, some of the African-Americans who had sided with them in the hopes for a better life ended up in London "where poverty forever nipped at their heels" and a majority "were taken to the cold, hard, rocky soils of Nova Scotia, where they tried and failed to make a go of farming, before moving again, this time to Britain's new Sierra Leone colony in West Africa."⁹³ There was no single easy path or choice that guaranteed freedom, prosperity, or even life for African-Americans.

The difficulties Wheatley faced in reconciling the different layers of her identity--woman, African, American, Christian, enslaved, free--and choosing to embrace an American identity crop up throughout her writing. In "To the University of Cambridge," written in 1767, Wheatley encouraged the young scholars to remember their Christian duties even as they pursued earthly knowledge.⁹⁴ Wheatley's description of her native Africa in this poem as "The sable Land of error's darkest night," and her description of herself as "An Ethiop," shows how the young Wheatley understood her identity as an enslaved African to separate her from the young white American men she spoke to.⁹⁵ Wheatley began her poem "Deism" also from 1767 with the lines,

⁹² Donald R. Wright, *African Americans in the Colonial Era: From African Origins through the American Revolution* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 203.

⁹³ Wright, *African Americans in the*, 198.

⁹⁴ Wheatley, "To the University of Cambridge, wrote in 1767," in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 105-106.

⁹⁵ Phillis Wheatley, "To the University of Cambridge, wrote in 1767," in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 105-106.

“Must Ethiopians be employ’d for you/ Greatly rejoice if any good I do,” again recognizing the racial divide that separated her from her white readers.⁹⁶ At the young age of thirteen or fourteen when she wrote these poems, Wheatley had not entirely integrated the different facets of her identity and conceived of herself as an American the same as any white colonist.

However, there were already early signs of Wheatley using Christianity to transcend perceived racial differences between black and white Americans. As Carretta explained, by labeling herself Ethiopian and not African or black, Wheatley alluded to the presence of Ethiopians in the Bible and “claim[ed] an identity that grant[ed] her biblical authority to speak to her readers.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, as she continued to mature as a poet and as an adult, Wheatley would emphasize the power of Christianity to erase differences between individuals and unite communities, as she did in her elegy to Whitefield. As Wheatley wrote in a letter to the British philanthropist and merchant John Thornton, in 1773, God was “no respecter of Persons: being equally the great Maker of all.”⁹⁸ It is in large part through her emphasis on her Christian identity that Wheatley claimed an American identity and asserted her equality with white patriots.

Wheatley not only chose to ally herself with the patriot cause, but through her poetry she demanded that white patriots and political leaders recognize the humanity of African-Americans and their equal claims to inclusion in the national body. These demands are perhaps nowhere more evident than in her poem “To His Excellency General Washington” which she sent directly to Washington in 1776. While the accompanying letter to Washington opened with the customary entreaties for his forgiveness for Wheatley taking “the freedom to address your Excellency in the enclosed poem,” it was nonetheless a bold assertion of Wheatley’s belief that

⁹⁶ Phillis Wheatley, “Deism,” in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 70.

⁹⁷ Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography*, 57.

⁹⁸ Phillis Wheatley to John Thornton, December 1, 1773, letter, in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 150.

Washington and other American soldiers were fighting for her freedom as much as anyone else's.⁹⁹ Coming from a newly free black woman who had experienced actual enslavement, the lines,

“While freedom’s cause her anxious breast alarms,/ She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms./ See mother earth her offspring’s fate bemoan,/ And nations gaze at scenes before unknown!”

carried stronger implications than if written by a white American.¹⁰⁰ For Wheatley, “freedom’s cause” was not just the United States’ independence from Britain and the right of white men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but the cause of all African-Americans who were enslaved and denied equality with white Americans. For Wheatley, the American Revolution represented an opportunity for “before unknown” freedom for black Americans who had long been denied such. Wheatley’s reminder to Washington that the eyes of other nations were on the fledgling United States also served as a subtle warning to the Virginian enslaver that judgment would be passed on white Americans who claimed to fight for liberty and yet continued to hold their fellow human beings in slavery.

Phillis Wheatly took control of the patriotic rhetoric of freedom and slavery used by white Americans to contextualize their struggle with England to include herself and all African-Americans in the national body and advocate against slavery and white supremacy. Wheatley tapped into changing ideas of patriotism that relied on the individual’s ability to connect emotionally to those around them to not only claim patriotism and civic virtue for black Americans, but reveal the hypocrisy of white slaveholding Americans who spoke of freedom and resistance to tyranny while simultaneously denying the same to black Americans. In writing and publishing her poetry, Wheatley served as a powerful counterargument to the idea that patriotism

⁹⁹ Phillis Wheatley to George Washington, April 1776, letter, in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 88.

¹⁰⁰ Wheatley, “To His Excellency General Washington,” in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 89.

was the sole provenance of white men and reclaimed the humanity denied to her and other African-Americans. In a letter to the Mohegan Reverend Samson Occom, Wheatley pointed out the “strange Absurdity” of “How well the Cry for Liberty, and the reverse Disposition for the Exercise of oppressive Power over others agree[d],” in the rhetoric and ideology of white American patriots.¹⁰¹ Wheatley forcibly brought the contradictions and tyranny of slavery to the attention of a white public who would have preferred to keep them buried under their own purely rhetorical use of slavery.

¹⁰¹ Phillis Wheatley to the Rev. Samson Occom, February 11, 1774, letter, in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 153.

CHAPTER THREE

“my countrymen (I am sorry to call them mine)”: Navigating Loyalty in the Diary of Sarah Logan Fisher

Sarah Logan Fisher was born into a Quaker family deeply entrenched in Pennsylvanian society and history. Her grandfather James Logan--a highly educated scholar born in Ireland--moved to Philadelphia in 1699 when the founder of the Pennsylvania colony William Penn asked Logan to be his secretary.¹⁰² Logan held a variety of important political positions in the Pennsylvanian government and when the governor died in 1736, it was Logan who briefly held the role of chief executive of the state as he was at that point president of the Provincial Council.¹⁰³ Logan established a successful fur-trading business and became a central figure in Philadelphia’s scientific community because of his agricultural experiments and papers published on astronomy, geometry, mathematics, and navigation.¹⁰⁴ Fisher’s father, William Logan, also became an important man in Pennsylvania, serving as a provincial councilor and inheriting the large family estate of Stenton in 1751.¹⁰⁵

Sarah Logan was born the same year her renowned grandfather passed away and her father inherited the Stenton estate. Not much information is available about her childhood, but on St. Patrick’s Day in 1772 at age twenty-one she married Thomas Fisher, the oldest and well-

¹⁰² Kevin J. Hayes, "Logan, James (1674 1751)," in *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of the American Enlightenment*, ed. Mark Spencer, Bloomsbury, 2014, https://hollins.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/bloome/logan_james_1674_1751/0?institutionId=2601.

¹⁰³ Hayes, "Logan, James," in *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia*.

¹⁰⁴ Hayes, "Logan, James," in *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia*.

¹⁰⁵ Nicholas B. Wainwright, introduction to "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences': Philadelphia, 1776-1778," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 82, no. 4 (1958): 412.

educated son of another wealthy and respected Quaker family in Philadelphia.¹⁰⁶ While the marriage was certainly an economically and politically advantageous match for both families, it was also a love match between Sarah and Thomas as evidenced by Fisher's frequent fond descriptions of her husband in her diary, as well as her deep distress at their forced separation in 1777 when Thomas was arrested for his loyalist beliefs.¹⁰⁷

An integral part of the Quaker religion was a commitment to nonviolence, which placed many Quakers at odds with their patriotic neighbors as early as the Stamp Act Crisis in 1765 when many Friends worried the movement was becoming too violent.¹⁰⁸ When representatives of the Quakers of Pennsylvania and New Jersey met in Philadelphia on January 24, 1775 for a Meeting of Sufferings--the means by which members of the Society of Friends met to assess the persecution of Friends and seek redress--the conflict between the Colonies and Great Britain was the main topic of discussion. The representatives at the Meeting passed and then published a testimony which urged Friends "to discountenance and avoid every measure tending to excite dissatisfaction to the King, as supreme magistrate, or to the legal authority of his government."¹⁰⁹

The Quaker representatives criticized the patriot leaders' "spirit and temper" for being "destructive of the peace and harmony of civil society" instead of "promoting of such measures as would be most effectual for reconciling differences, or obtaining the redress of grievances."¹¹⁰

Not only did the increasingly violent and aggressive acts of the patriots conflict with the core

¹⁰⁶ Wainwright, introduction to "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 411.

¹⁰⁷ Wainwright, introduction to "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 411.

¹⁰⁸ Paige L. Whidbee, "The Quaker Exiles: 'The Cause of Every Inhabitant'," in *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 83, no. 1 (2016): 31.

¹⁰⁹ Society of Friends, *The testimony of the people called Quakers, given forth by a meeting ... held at Philadelphia the twenty-fourth day of the first month, 1775 [And subsequent documents, 1776-1777. Philadelphia] John Dunlap [1775]*, Broadside, from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006566657/>.

¹¹⁰ Society of Friends, *The testimony of the people called Quakers*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006566657/>.

tenets of Quakerism, but to the loyalist Quakers, the patriots' actions were broadly destructive to the good of society. This quote also shows that the Quakers recognized that many American colonists had valid grievances against the British; Quaker loyalists were not simply the enemies of the Revolution's values of liberty, freedom, and natural rights. For many Friends, the issue lay with the patriots' violent methods--not their ideals--and their calls for a complete severing of ties with Great Britain.

In an additional document from the 1775 Meeting of Sufferings, the Quaker representatives stated, "The benefits, advantages and favour we have experienced by our dependence on, and connection with, the Kings and government, [...] appear to demand from us the greatest circumspection, care and constant endeavors, to guard against every attempt, to alter or subvert that dependence and connection."¹¹¹ The Society of Friends linked their own prosperity to the relationship between the Colonies and the British government and feared the breaking of this dependence would result in the loss of their prosperity as well as further violence. In his study of the 9,338 loyalists from New York who either signed a loyalist declaration or took an oath of allegiance to King George III between April 1775 and November 1778, Christopher F. Minty found that, despite the fact that Quakers only made up 3% of New York's population at this time, they made up roughly 13% of loyalists whose religion could be identified.¹¹² From these findings, Minty concluded that many New York Quakers "viewed Loyalism as a political tool with which they could affect stability in their society," and continue to "rearticulate pacifism and nonviolence."¹¹³

¹¹¹ Society of Friends, *The testimony of the people called Quakers*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2006566657/>.

¹¹² Christopher F. Minty, "Reexamining Loyalist Identity during the American Revolution," in *The Consequences of Loyalism: Essays in Honor of Robert M. Calhoon*, ed. Rebecca Brannon and Joseph S. Moore (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 42.

¹¹³ Minty, "Reexamining Loyalist Identity," 43.

Given the Society of Friends' official stance on the conflict between the Colonies and Great Britain, it comes as no surprise that Sarah Logan Fisher was a firm loyalist. However, loyalist identity was complicated, not ideologically uniform, and about more than just maintaining the status quo. As Maya Jasanoff explained, loyalists "saw themselves both as American, in the sense that they were colonial residents, and as British, in the sense of being British subjects."¹¹⁴ The diary Fisher kept from 1776-1778 illustrates how she constructed her own identity as a loyalist Quaker woman in relation to her fellow loyalists, her patriot neighbors, and the American and British armies. My use of Fisher's diary as a source for understanding her loyalist identity is also indebted to Kacy Tillman's use of Quaker loyalist women's letters and journals "as the site of women's declarations and self-definitions," in which they "construct[ed] the war's—and their own— narrative."¹¹⁵ Through treating Fisher's diary as a place where she actively negotiated and constructed her identity, a different perspective on the American Revolution and its consequences for individuals' lives is revealed.

Fisher's diary provides an opposing perspective to the rhetoric and actions of the patriots and the American army. Fisher overwhelmingly emphasized the violence and destructive behavior of the patriots, repeatedly referring to them as "our violent people."¹¹⁶ To a loyalist Quaker like Fisher, the defining characteristic of Americans who called themselves patriots was not a love of liberty or freedom, but violence and the harm they did to their fellow community members. This was not just a rhetorical device for Fisher to express her frustration at the patriots, but reflected the reality of many loyalists who experienced and feared violence from their patriot

¹¹⁴ Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 24.

¹¹⁵ Tillman, "Constructing Female Loyalism(s) in the Delaware Valley," 48.

¹¹⁶ Sarah Logan Fisher, December 16, 1776, diary entry, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences": Philadelphia, 1776-1778," ed. Nicholas B. Wainwright, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 82, no. 4 (1958): 417.

neighbors. On July 4th, 1777, after celebrations commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Fisher wrote, “[...] those people’s windows were broken who put no candles in. We had 15 broken, [...] & all this for joy of having gained our liberty.”¹¹⁷ For other loyalists, the violence was much worse. In 1775 when the loyalist Thomas Brown refused to join a patriot association, he was seized from his plantation in the Georgia backcountry and taken to Augusta where his attackers tarred and feathered him before cutting strips off his scalp.¹¹⁸ For loyalists in majority patriot areas, such as Fisher in American army-occupied Philadelphia, potential acts of violence whether from soldiers, strangers, or their own neighbors strongly shaped their experience and perception of the war and the Revolution.

Fisher also characterized the patriots as hypocritical and framed the movement for American independence as a small minority of powerful people stirring up outrage against the British government for their own personal gain. On January 1, 1777, Fisher’s husband read Thomas Paine’s *The American Crisis* to her, which she described as, “a most violent, seditious, treasonable paper, [written] purposely to inflame the minds of the people & spirit them on to rebellion [...]”¹¹⁹ Fisher’s description of *The American Crisis* as a “treasonable paper” stressed the fact that she considered herself and her fellow Americans to be British subjects who owed loyalty to the King. In repeatedly emphasizing the violence of the patriots, Fisher also conversely defined herself and other Quaker loyalists by their commitment to pacifism and nonviolence, showing how important these beliefs were to her identity. In her representation of *The American Crisis* and its author, Fisher did not describe a man speaking for the majority of Americans, or a pamphlet that honestly expressed general public opinion. Instead, the pamphlet was written by a

¹¹⁷ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 438.

¹¹⁸ Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, 21-23.

¹¹⁹ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 420.

man intentionally trying to manipulate the majority of common people to rebel against their rightful king by preying upon their emotions and misleading them.

Fisher also defined the patriot leaders by what she perceived as their hypocrisy and mistreatment of loyalists. On January 4, 1777, she wrote,

“[...] a paper came out from the Committee of Safety unlike anything I ever before heard of, except the Spanish Inquisition, declaring that every person who refused the Continental money should be liable for the first offence to forfeit the goods & a sum of equal value, for the second offence to forfeit the same & to be banished [...] a most extraordinary instance of arbitrary power & of the liberty we shall enjoy should their government ever be established, a tyrannical government it will prove from weak & wicked men.”¹²⁰

After fighting broke out at Lexington and Concord, colonies established Committees of Safety for the purpose of administering oaths of loyalty to the newly formed patriot governments and controlling loyalist dissidents.¹²¹ In comparing the actions of Philadelphia’s Committee of Safety to the Spanish Inquisition, Fisher associated them with what in her mind as a Protestant British-subject was an emblem of foreign tyranny. By linking the Committee to this emblem of foreign tyranny, Fisher thus denied the Committee members a place in the American nation.

Additionally, Fisher directly commented on the hypocrisy of the patriots as she pointed out how they claimed to believe in liberty and yet denied the same to loyalists who they punished for their beliefs and--as Fisher would soon realize when her husband was arrested--provided no legal recourse for those who were deemed to have committed a crime against the patriot government.

For Fisher and many other loyalist women, the war directly endangered their families and invaded their homes. This threatening of the domestic sphere greatly affected loyalist women’s experiences and perceptions of events around them. On January 23, 1777, Fisher wrote,

“[...] Committee of Safety ordering the barracks master to quarter all the soldiers [...] on the non-associators. This wicked resolve is particularly leveled against

¹²⁰ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 420-421.

¹²¹ Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, 28.

Friends, as the violent people were much enraged at the last publication of the Meeting of Sufferings. If they carry it into execution, it will be an act of violence almost too great to bear as they are men of very little principle, under no discipline, & so intolerably dirty that even in the cleanest of houses the stench of their dirt is great enough to cause an infectious sickness.”¹²²

The proposed forced quartering of patriot soldiers in loyalist homes by the Committee of Safety was not only a hypocritical move on the part of the patriots--who had protested so loudly in Boston when they were forced to quarter British soldiers--but to Fisher as a Quaker and a loyalist, this act was an aggressive invasion of her home by the war and the patriots. It was not only against Quakers’ pacifism to engage in violence and fight as soldiers themselves, but their beliefs also dictated that they were not to provide any assistance to the war effort, which included the quartering of soldiers for either side. This quartering of soldiers--as well as the hostility that many members of the patriot government in Philadelphia displayed towards Quakers--led Fisher to conclude that though the act did not specifically mention them, it was “particularly leveled against Friends,” and designed to destroy the neutrality they professed.

Fisher’s characterization of the patriot soldiers as “men of very little principle, under no discipline, & so intolerably dirty,” further revealed the particular threat she felt they represented to the sanctity of her upper-class home.¹²³ While Americans of all social classes and backgrounds could be found among both the patriot and loyalist camps, by focusing on the dirtiness of the patriot soldiers and stressing their lack of principles, Fisher positioned them as uncontrolled lower-class ruffians who threatened the health and safety of good, clean, upper-class homes. The assignment of class inferiority to the patriot soldiers mirrored how Fisher talked about the patriots more broadly as she frequently characterized them as violent and uncontrolled. This description of the American soldiers from Fisher’s diary shows how her status

¹²² Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 425-426.

¹²³ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 426.

as an upper-class woman formed an important part of her identity and was closely connected to her self-conception as a loyalist. If the patriots were low-class, dirty, and chaotic, then the loyalists who constructed their identities in opposition to the rebelling Americans were socially superior, clean, and refined.

Fisher continued her denigration of the patriot soldiers as unprincipled and lower-class in her treatment of the American and British armies and their respective leaders. In an entry from February 25, 1777, Fisher praised an essay published in a York newspaper about George Washington for “painting in high colors his treachery & deceit,” and rhetorically asked her diary, “Can there be a greater instance of a heart depraved by ambition of the lowest kind than this, an ambition that wishes to raise his own fortune by the ruin of those whose souls have too much virtue not to oppose the violent & wicked measures now carrying on.”¹²⁴ This description of Washington contradicted the praise given to him by patriots such as Wheatley who described him in a poem as “first in place and honours--[...]/ Fam’d for thy valour, for thy virtues more.”¹²⁵ Just as Fisher viewed Thomas Paine and *The American Crisis* as an attempt to manipulate the American people into rebelling against their own best interests, she saw Washington in much the same light. Fisher did not see Washington and other Americans calling for independence as disinterested patriots with only the best interests of their country at heart, but as selfish and ambitious men leading the rest of the country “blindly” to “their own destruction.”¹²⁶ Because the patriot leaders were acting out of selfish ambition, it was the loyalist Americans who possessed the greatest virtue and who were unjustly suffering due to the actions of the patriots.

¹²⁴ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 429.

¹²⁵ Phillis Wheatley, “To His Excellency General Washington,” in *Phillis Wheatley: Complete Writings*, 89.

¹²⁶ Fisher, February 28, 1777, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 431.

In contrast to how she wrote about Washington and the American patriots, Fisher described General Howe and the British Army as civilized, just, and fair. In the entry from the day before she wrote about Washington, Fisher wrote an extended passage praising all of Howe's virtues:

“His tenderness of disposition & humane benevolence of heart is such that he will never risk the health & lives of his men to gain any conquest [...]. how fit to rule is such a man who, constantly studious of the welfare of his people, is cautious of running them into any unnecessary danger [...] yet when they are called into the field of battle the spirit of ancient heroism is again revived, & we may see the noble fire of loyal Britons glow in their breasts & sparkle in their eyes, [...]”¹²⁷

In this passage Fisher conflated both General Howe and King George III into one benevolent father-figure who not only ruled over, but also cared for the well-being of his children-subjects. This image of British leadership contrasted sharply with the image of Washington ruled by his own private ambitions and uncaring for the happiness or safety of the American people. As such, it was King George III who would not only best rule over the Americans, but who also had more of a natural right to do so as a caring father-ruler. Fisher also aligned the English with classical virtues and martial spirit to further confirm their right to rule and suggest their victory over the patriots was inevitable and just.

Fisher's home and family were further threatened when on September 2, 1777, her husband Thomas and several other men were arrested after the discovery of a collection of seditious papers supposedly authored by Quakers. According to Fisher, the men were arrested “without any regular warrant or any written paper mentioning their crime.”¹²⁸ Fisher described the eleventh paper which Congress had “apprehended to be of a criminal nature,” as “a notorious forgery” that “any impartial person must see how great a falsehood it is.”¹²⁹ The final paper

¹²⁷ Fisher, February 24, 1777, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrence,” 429.

¹²⁸ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 444.

¹²⁹ Fisher, September 7, 1777, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 446.

described here by Fisher was a letter signed by “the British Army” and addressed to “The Spanktown Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends,” asking for information about the movements of the Continental Army, and a vague reply from the “Spanktown Yearly Meeting” addressed, once again, to “the British Army”.¹³⁰ Given the fact that Congress did not take the time to verify the authenticity of these letters and Quakers and non-Quakers alike insisted that the Spanktown Yearly Meeting did not exist, historians have concluded this final document was a forgery designed to slander the Quakers as traitors and provide an excuse for their arrest.¹³¹ Furthermore, the particular men who were arrested were in no way specifically implicated by these papers and instead were likely chosen for arrest because they were the most wealthy and prominent members of Philadelphia’s Quaker community.¹³²

The arrest and exile of her husband brought the destruction of the war directly into Fisher’s home and family, destabilizing her identity as a wife and a mother. When Fisher learned her husband was to be held prisoner in Virginia, she wrote, “[...] my husband [...] is likely to be torn from me by the hands of violence & cruelty, & I left within a few weeks of my lying-in, unprotected & alone, without the sweet soother of all my cares to be with me in that painful hour.”¹³³ Not only was Fisher’s family being torn apart because of an unlawful and arbitrary exercise of power on the part of the patriot government, but it was happening just as she was about to give birth and was therefore in an extremely vulnerable position. The traumatic experience of undergoing this separation while only twenty-six years old, pregnant, and the threat of violence against loyalists was always hanging in the air likely cemented in Fisher’s mind the destructive force of the independence movement. As a loyalist, a Quaker, and a woman,

¹³⁰ Whidbee, “The Quaker Exiles [...],” 34.

¹³¹ Tillman, “Constructing Female Loyalty(s) in the Delaware Valley,” 49.

¹³² Whidbee, “The Quaker Exiles [...],” 36.

¹³³ Fisher, September 4, 1777, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 445.

Fisher frequently saw herself as the innocent and suffering victim of the patriot's "violence & cruelty."

The arrest and exile of Fisher's husband destabilized Fisher's identity as a wife and mother as she suddenly found herself taking on new roles and responsibilities. When Thomas was first exiled to Virginia and Fisher was left alone in Philadelphia, she suddenly found herself having "to think & provide everything for [her] family, at a time when it [was] so difficult to provide anything at almost any price."¹³⁴ Ten days after her husband's exile, Fisher described herself as "Solitary & alone, & feeling as weak as if almost unable to support the painful anxiety of my mind," and further expressed her feelings of vulnerability by describing her patriot neighbors as "ravenous wolves & lions that prowl about for prey."¹³⁵ In these first few weeks as she suddenly found herself burdened with taking care of her family alone in the midst of violent hostility from many of her neighbors, Fisher saw herself as a weak "prey" without the protection of her husband. Since her marriage, Fisher's identity would have been tied to her husband's, both legally under the laws of coverture and socially as she became Thomas Fisher's wife and the mother of his children. But now, her husband was gone and she needed to adapt her identity and sense of self to her new circumstances in order to survive and protect her children.

As time went on, Fisher found the strength within herself to take on her increased responsibilities and protect her family, all while staying true to her own principles as a Quaker woman. When patriot soldiers came to Fisher demanding she give them blankets for the army's use, Fisher proudly wrote, "I told them I had none, that I had never given them any, but that they had robbed me of what was far dearer than any property I had in the world, that they had taken

¹³⁴ Fisher, November 1, 1777, diary entry, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 456.

¹³⁵ Fisher, September 21, 1777, diary entry, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 448.

from me my husband, & that I could by no means encourage war of any kind.”¹³⁶ Fisher not only stood up to two likely armed soldiers when she was in a vulnerable position as a woman with an absent husband, but she was also able to hold firm to her pacifist beliefs as a Quaker. In making this declaration, Fisher not only articulated a clear and consistent religious and political ideology, but also demonstrated how she as a woman, a wife, and a Quaker had a personal stake in the events going on in the public world of war and revolution around her.

Fisher continued to develop and embrace an identity as the provider and protector of her family as her husband’s exile continued. About being awoken by the sound of battle on December 5, 1777, Fisher wrote, “I did not know the cause, but thought if the town was on fire what I should do with myself & little children, yet I was supported under it with great calmness, tho’ my bed at times shook under me, & the windows rattled very much.”¹³⁷ The calmness and confidence Fisher expressed in this passage differs greatly from the anxiety and fear she felt over two months before when her husband was first exiled to Virginia. While she still missed her husband and hoped for his swift return, Fisher had not only taken on the identity of protector of her family, but had also grown confident in this role as she navigated the dangerous world around her. Fisher shared this experience of taking on new roles and identities with other loyalist women who were separated from their husbands. Judith Van Buskirk documented how the “Women of the Pemberton family, whose husbands were [...] in Winchester, found themselves making decisions they had never made before,” such as managing and protecting their property and renting to new tenants.¹³⁸ Many loyalist women experienced the forced separation of their

¹³⁶ Fisher, September 22, 1777, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 449.

¹³⁷ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 457-458.

¹³⁸ Judith Van Buskirk, “They Didn’t Join the Band: Disaffected Women in Revolutionary Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania History* 62, no. 3 (1995): 318.

families as the public, masculine world of war and politics invaded their homes, and they had to adapt their identities and actions to their new circumstances.

The hostility many patriots displayed towards Quakers worked to exclude Friends from the patriots' vision of the emerging national body. John Adams deeply mistrusted the Friends and fought fiercely against those members of the Continental Congress who sympathized with them for their pacifist beliefs.¹³⁹ In a letter to Abigail Adams from September 8, 1777, John described the Quakers as, "some Jesuits [...] who love Money and Land better than Liberty or Religion. The Hypocrites are endeavouring to raise the Cry of Persecution, and to give this Matter a religious Turn [...]. American Independence has disappointed them, which makes them hate it. Yet the Dastards dare not avow their Hatred to it, it seems."¹⁴⁰ To John Adams and other patriots, the Quakers were untrustworthy traitors to America who did not deserve to be included as members of the new nation. As such, Congress and the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania could ignore their pleas for a hearing and summarily exile the Quaker prisoners who continued to refuse to take an oath of loyalty to the patriot government--despite the fact that the swearing of such oaths was well-known to be against the Quaker religion.¹⁴¹

The actions of Congress and the Council against the exiled Quaker men further solidified Fisher's identity as a loyalist, despite the Society of Friends' official neutrality. A few days after her husband and the other prisoners were sent to Virginia, Fisher wrote that the men were persecuted for "no other crime [...] than that they looked upon themselves to be subjects of Britain."¹⁴² To Fisher, it was not any action her husband took that he was exiled for, but his

¹³⁹ Whidbee, "The Quaker Exiles [...]," 32.

¹⁴⁰ John Adams to Abigail Adams, September 8, 1777, letter, in *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17770908ja&hi=1&query=september%201777&tag=text&archive=all&rec=7&start=0&numRecs=329>.

¹⁴¹ Whidbee, "The Quaker Exiles [...]," 37, 39.

¹⁴² Fisher, September 13, 1777, diary entry, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 447.

chosen identity as a British subject. This choice of nationality was not seen by patriot Americans as a passive acceptance of a long-standing identity, but as an active declaration of treason. As tensions between different factions in Philadelphia increased, many found themselves unable to claim ambiguous identities and forced into increasingly rigid political allegiances. As Tillman explained in her analysis of the Philadelphia Quaker Anna Rawle's refusal to place a candle in her window during the July 4th celebrations, such an action could have symbolized a multitude of things: "Loyalism, pacifism, neutrality, disaffection, or some combination[...]." Yet to the angry patriots roaming the streets, such an act symbolized "unequivocal alignment with the British."¹⁴³ As Quakers were increasingly punished for their neutrality and for continuing to see themselves as British subjects, it became clear to them that they were not welcome in the new nation the patriots envisioned and their identities as loyalists further solidified.

Despite her increasing identification with the loyalists, Fisher's understanding of her own national identity remained complicated and enigmatic. The ambiguity surrounding her national identity is evident in the language she used to talk about the American and the British armies. On December 27, 1776, Fisher recorded news of Washington's victory at the Battle of Trenton, writing, "This morning heard an account of the success of our American army against the English at Trenton. [...] This piece of news greatly elated our Whigs, & as much depressed the Tories, but I sincerely hope & believe that before long General Howe will subdue their rebellious spirit & give them but little reason to rejoice."¹⁴⁴ Despite her loyalty to the King and wishes for a British victory, Fisher described the Continental Army as "our American army" and the British army under Howe simply as "the English", seemingly associating herself more with the American patriots than the British.

¹⁴³ Tillman, "Constructing Female Loyalism(s)," 56.

¹⁴⁴ Fisher, diary entry, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 419.

This pattern of linguistically claiming the American army and rebelling patriots continued throughout much of Fisher's diary and shows how, despite rejecting a patriot identity, Fisher did claim an American identity. On January 13, 1777, Fisher recorded in her diary how the Americans had retaken "Elizabeth Town," and she remarked, "This news affected my mind, as every little victory or even fancied success makes our violent people still more violent."¹⁴⁵ Fisher absolutely abhorred the violence perpetuated by the patriots, both in the army and in unsanctioned crowd violence that she constantly had to fear. Yet Fisher did not completely disavow the patriots or reject any associations between herself and them. Despite her hatred of them and how antithetical their actions were to her religious beliefs, Fisher saw her national identity as intrinsically tied to the patriots. Later on October 23, 1777, when describing how American soldiers continued to fire at an English man-of-war when the ship was on fire, Fisher wrote, "[...] but my countrymen (I am sorry to call them mine) seem to possess a more than savage barbarity."¹⁴⁶ Despite the opposing sides Fisher and the patriots fell on in the conflict between the Colonies and Great Britain, the rebelling Americans had long since been her neighbors, acquaintances, relatives--her countrymen. Even when she was totally condemning them, Fisher was unable to disown the patriots and completely separate loyalist and patriot Americans in her mind.

Despite how she wished for their success and frequently praised English generals and soldiers, Fisher's diary also demonstrates the tension that existed between many loyalist Americans and the British army despite them ostensibly being on the same side of the war. On December 9, 1777, Fisher made note of a recent skirmish between the British and American forces near Philadelphia and bitterly recorded how:

¹⁴⁵ Fisher, diary entry, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 422.

¹⁴⁶ Fisher, diary entry, "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 454.

“The most [the British] did was plundering & ruining many people. Those who had always been steady friends to government fared no better than the rest. [...] One very honest man who had always been a steady friend to government & had refused the continental money had his house entirely burnt down. Such is the poor protection we meet with.”¹⁴⁷

While earlier Fisher had been able to write about the British army as heroes who would save her and other Quaker loyalists from patriot-occupied Philadelphia, the realities of being a civilian caught between two sides in a war broke this fantasy. Fisher’s comments about the loyalist man whose house was burned down by the British reveal how she felt betrayed and abandoned by the British. These feelings would again surface when the British evacuated Philadelphia on June 18, 1778 and left Fisher and all the other loyalists at the mercy of the patriots and the American army once more.¹⁴⁸

The key to grasping Fisher’s loyalism and her own understanding of her place within the emerging United States lies the layered identities many American loyalists possessed as they “saw themselves both as American, in the sense that they were colonial residents, and as British, in the sense of being British subjects.”¹⁴⁹ Fisher was ardently loyal to the British crown. She rejected the patriot leaders who claimed to speak for the will of the people as violent, destructive to America’s general welfare, and as a selfish and ambitious minority. At the same time, Fisher felt a distance between herself and British citizens in mainland England, the British army, and the King. This distance was further strengthened as Fisher experienced betrayal and harm by the English soldiers she had initially idolized before she learned not “to put too much confidence in armies.”¹⁵⁰ Despite how much she condemned them and attempted to distance herself as a virtuous Quaker loyalist from the actions of the patriots, Fisher could not help but acknowledge

¹⁴⁷ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 459.

¹⁴⁸ Fisher, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 465.

¹⁴⁹ Jasanoff, *Liberty’s Exiles*, 24.

¹⁵⁰ Fisher, June 8, 1778, diary entry, “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 463.

them as members of her community and her country. The identities and fates of all Americans, whether patriot, loyalist, or somewhere in between, were all inseparably tied together and mutually dependent.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that American women actively contributed to the building of a national image for the emerging United States as they engaged in the redefinition of patriotism and enlightened debates in their writing, interactions with each other, and their daily lived experiences. In making this argument, this paper has shown that the important intellectual work of nation-building did not just occur among wealthy enfranchised white men who monopolized political and governing power for themselves. It also occurred in regular people's daily lives as they sought to make sense of their familial, communal, and national positions in their rapidly changing world. To define the emerging American nation exclusively by the terms that elite white men defined it is to do the vast majority of Americans who were denied political or social power a great disservice. To privilege already historically privileged voices as universal or as the only conception of nationhood, patriotism, and civic duty presents a distorted view of history that erases the tremendous complexities, disagreements, debates, and fights for inclusion that actually took place during the American Revolution and War of Independence.

This paper's analysis of Abigail Adams's correspondence shows how she made bold claims to the traditionally masculine virtues of patriotism and civic duty--virtues that many men at the time denied women were capable of possessing. Even Adams's husband, John Adams, was largely dismissive of her claims for women's equal capacity for patriotism and demands for greater legal rights. When Adams urged her husband to "Remember the Ladies" as he and other men drafted the Declaration of Independence and laws for the new nation, his response was to write, "[...] I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of

Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient -- that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent -- that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented.”¹⁵¹ John refused to treat Adams’s complaints with any seriousness and instead reduced them to a mere joke. Despite his dismissive and mocking tone, John’s response to Adams’s letter revealed something important--a deeper, underlying reality and anxiety that pervaded late 18th-century America.

The outcome of the Revolution and the ultimate exclusion of women and African-Americans from political power and the national body was not a foregone conclusion. Looking back from the present, it can be easy to view the Revolution as a largely conservative movement concerned with maintaining the status quo in which power both before and after remained in the hands of a privileged few white men.¹⁵² While it is true that political power was limited in this way and the practical application of the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence was severely limited, this was not inevitable, and it did not seem inevitable to people at the time. When John Adams wrote of children and apprentices becoming disobedient, students pushing back against the authority of their teachers, and Native Americans and enslaved African-Americans rejecting white people’s authority over them, he gave voice to the fears that many elite white men felt: the fear that their maintenance of power was not guaranteed and that their rhetoric of freedom, liberty, and equality for all may actually come true. In John Adams’s own home, his wife was audaciously asserting women’s intellectual equality with men, their right to

¹⁵¹ John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776, letter, in *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*, Massachusetts Historical Society, <https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=L17760414ja>.

¹⁵² See Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980).

engage in political discourse, and pushing back against his own complete legal authority over her as a husband.

Phillis Wheatley claimed an American national identity and harnessed white Americans' patriotic rhetoric of freedom and metaphorical slavery to incorporate African-Americans into the national body and make powerful arguments for the abolition of slavery. Wheatley would not have taken up the patriots' cause or returned to Massachusetts from London where she could have emancipated herself if she had considered it a foregone conclusion that black Americans were going to continue to be oppressed, enslaved, and denied a place in the nation as citizens. For Wheatley and other African-Americans, the time period from the Revolution to the early years of the Republic was a time of opportunity and potential, when the possibility of freedom and equality for them as well as white Americans seemed feasible. White founders recognized that the old hierarchies regarding race and gender were being questioned and were no longer guaranteed. To treat the exclusion of women and African-Americans from the national body and the denial of their natural rights as an inevitability is to deny the white male founders' culpability in willfully and intentionally choosing to exclude them and deny them their rights. The exclusion of women and African-Americans from the nation was not just a byproduct of some nebulous historic process; it was an intentional act on the part of those in power who had a vested interest in maintaining gender and racial hierarchies.

The chapter on Sarah Logan Fisher further calls attention to the fact that there was no singular concept of the nation or patriotism during the Revolution and War of Independence, but rather a plurality of competing concepts. Estimates of how many Americans were loyalists has varied widely and is difficult to pin down; John Adams thought that a third of all colonists were loyalists while estimates among modern historians have been as high as five hundred thousand

loyalists or 19 percent of the white population.¹⁵³ Regardless of the exact number, a sizable portion of Americans were loyalists. The harsh treatment of these Americans and the refusal of many patriot leaders to extend the natural rights they claimed to be fighting for to loyalists shows again how patriot ideology--especially white patriot ideology--was intrinsically exclusionary. As Anderson stressed in his definition of the nation, a fundamental aspect of this imagined community is that it is “imagined as [...] inherently limited.”¹⁵⁴ The existence of loyalists who maintained their dual identities as colonial Americans and British subjects was a real and intellectual problem for patriots, and their presence had to be explained or excised from the national body. Logan’s diary pushes back against any myth of consensus about the United States’ founding and prevents a simple one-sided reading of patriotic rhetoric.

Given the rise of extreme nationalism and far-right political groups whose talking points and ideology are reliant on a specific myth of the United States’ founding, it is absolutely vital that not only historians, but all Americans critically examine the rhetoric that American national identity was founded on--and which continues to shape the country today. There has never been a singular unifying American national identity that honestly and fully embraced the idea that “all men are created equal.” The history of American nationalism and patriotism has always been a fierce debate over who is and isn’t American, and who does and doesn’t deserve to enjoy the rights enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The 1776 Commission established by Donald Trump in his last few days as president illustrates how nationalist politicians and movements today continue to employ a sanitized and false image of uniformity surrounding the founding of the U.S. to push their conservative agendas. Despite involving no

¹⁵³ Rebecca Brannon, “Introduction,” in *The Consequences of Loyalism: Essays in Honor of Robert Calhoon*, ed. Rebecca Brannon and Joseph S. Moore (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 1-8.

¹⁵⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

actual historians, the report issued by the 1776 Commission claimed to be “grounded on a history [...] that is ‘accurate, honest, unifying, inspiring, and ennobling.’”¹⁵⁵ But attempting to write a history that is “honest” and attempting to write a history that is “ennobling” are not the same, and the process of “ennobling” a country’s history inherently involves the distortion of the truth and the hiding of uncomfortable facts and contradictions. In looking at the writing of Abigail Adams, Phillis Wheatley, and Sarah Logan Fisher, this paper has confronted the messiness, the hypocrisy, and the limits of American patriotism and national identity in the late 18th-century and shown that elite white men were not--and are not--the sole arbiters of American identity.

¹⁵⁵Larry P. Arin, Carol Swain, and Matthew Spalding, eds., *The 1776 Report* (Washington, D.C.: The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, 2021), 1.

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