

The Patriarchal Gentleman: Gender Roles of Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century American Women Through the Mind of Thomas Jefferson

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Thomas Jefferson was a man synonymous with the American Revolution and a brilliant American political mind. Much has been written about the democratic thought of Jefferson, but little of it focuses on his ideas about women and politics. A starting point to look at is his relationship with women to whom he wrote letters to, mainly friends and relatives. Through his correspondences with selected female relatives and friends, Jefferson reveals his beliefs about the importance of a woman's domestic role in American society by establishing a set of social rules, directly and indirectly stated, meant to keep women's minds off politics. This, among other reasons, has led many Jefferson historians to believe, "there has been an increasing tendency to devalue the third president's significance as a proverbial democratic icon." This does not appear to be accurate since his beliefs about female domesticity do not appear to diverge from those at the time.ⁱ

The purpose of this research is to examine the nature of the correspondences, and the overall context of Jefferson's discussions in hopes to find out what he thought about women speaking and engaging in the world outside of the home. His beliefs about the social and domestic roles of women are shown through his letters to his daughters; Martha, affectionately referred to as Patsy, and Mary, referred to as Polly and Maria. Political matters make up much of his correspondences with Abigail Adams, the wife of friend and fellow Declaration of Independence draftee John Adams, and Jefferson's European love interest Maria Cosway. A discrepancy appears when contrasting his discourse with Adams and Cosway, asking when it becomes okay to talk political matters with overseers of the household. This study allows one to

ask new questions about the ever-changing role of women, and how much their status rose or declined as a result of his presidential policies. It also attempts to get to the heart of why John Kaminski and other historians say that Jefferson wished to keep women out of politics.

Kaminski, writing about the Jefferson-Cosway correspondence in his edited book of letters, *Jefferson In Love: The Love Letters Between Thomas Jefferson and Maria Cosway*, opines, “They could talk for hours, but never about politics- a subject Jefferson felt women should eschew.” This study looks at why his statement much goes deeper by showing Jefferson’s beliefs were consistent with contemporary gender roles.ⁱⁱ

A look at the common speaking conventions of men and women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century helps to explain the writing conventions Jefferson would have used when talking to women. The importance of mutual affection and respect were the norm, as formal speech between men and women adhered to certain conventions that, “insured that letters, like polite conversation, were to be civilized, that the forms of address among ladies and gentlemen were above all meant to be courteous.” Jefferson adhered to polite conventions as he begins his letters with ‘Madam’ or ‘My Dear Madam,’ and ends them with a hope for their good health or by saying ‘Your most obedient and humble servant.’ In turn, the women use ‘Sir’ and conclude in a similar manner in their letters. Although this was a common convention, written evidence of mutual respect did not necessarily mean gender equality in Jefferson’s era, and the letters to and from Jefferson appear to be no exception to the rule. The letters also allowed for “gallantry on the male side, signaling dominance, and modesty and discretion for the female, as a sign of submission.” Women could not escape from being talked down to by men or told what to do in some cases. Jefferson lapses into this, as it reflects his overall beliefs about women and a woman’s place in society. His conventions will be compared to Abigail Adams’ correspondence

with James Lovell, a political friend of her husband's whose letters were flirtatious for the time. This will show Jefferson's overall passivity in these situations, while giving an example of how he conforms to common social conventions like respect and a belief in the proper role of a woman.ⁱⁱⁱ

It can be assumed that Jefferson believed in socially constructed gender roles, as he lived in a time when this was the case. Jefferson separates men and women's gender differences in his famous letter colloquially known as the "The Head and the Heart" letter to Maria Cosway by saying "that the lady had moreover accomplishments, belonging to her sex, which might form a chapter apart for her: such as music, modesty, beauty, and that softness of disposition which is the ornament of her sex and charm of ours." He already sets females apart as a softer, more docile sex than males, almost a charm or spectacle to men. By doing this, he establishes dominance in his letters without the knowledge of doing so. This gets internalized in his advice letters to his daughters, as he tells them how they should act in the social and domestic spheres.^{iv}

Most of Jefferson's surviving correspondences to his daughters appear during his time away while in Congress or while serving as a Minister to France in the 1780s. He gives his daughters advice about how to live rich, full lives and must do this as a single father since his wife's death in 1782. He must take on the role of a single, absentee, parent. While in France, he tells his teenage daughter Martha what is most interesting to him will be to see her, as well as Mary, developing "those principles of virtue and goodness which will make you valuable to others and happy in yourselves, and acquiring those talents and that degree of science which will guard you at all times against ennui, the most dangerous poison of life." Jefferson wishes for his daughters to be useful, productive members of society, and hopes that they learn enough to keep themselves active and interested. He reiterates this point, saying, "A mind always employed is

always happy” and possibly attempts to shock them by telling his daughter “the idle are the only wretched.” He hopes that his daughters are always thinking and always busy, but not focused on non-domestic matters.^v

Jefferson does speak to his daughters about what will make them successful domestically. His beliefs on womanhood are closely related to the beliefs studied in Barbara Welter’s article “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” explaining why he does not focus on possible lives in politics for his daughters. As Welter explains, “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.” Assuming this is what Jefferson wants his daughters to strive for, the basis for their discussion should center on this. Although Welter writes about the period from 1820-1860 in America, this definition of ‘true’ womanhood for the early to mid-nineteen hundreds is constructed by Jefferson’s generation. Thus, he writes to his daughter Mary in 1790 (when she was about twelve years old), “I am much pleased with the account you give me of your occupations, and the making the pudding is as good an article of them as any... You must make the most of your time while you are with so good an aunt who can learn you every thing.”^{vi} Jefferson is proud of his daughter’s apparent culinary skills, allowing one to see Mary’s skill in matters of the home. Not only does she develop as a cook, but he also tells his daughter to stay close to her aunt. Her aunt, and apparently no one else, can “learn (her) every thing” that she will need to know. He wishes for Mary to get all of the domestic training necessary so that she can succeed as a woman in American society by managing a household. This compares to Jefferson putting a “Mrs. Hopkinson” in charge of looking after Martha while he is away at Congress. He thus provides

his daughters with proper female role models to raise them on the importance of home life in their mother's absence.^{vii}

The importance for Jefferson for his daughters to be domestic caretakers can be traced to the American Revolution. Young women born after the war, like Martha and Mary, were reared in a society where women's "postwar behavior changed as a result of the experience of assuming previously 'male' responsibilities in the absence of men during the war...and of reassessing their own abilities after they had coped with wartime disruptions." This reveals the increased role of women in the age during the Revolution by assuming their role increased inside the home while men's role increased outside the home. Jefferson understands that for his daughters to be successful in their lives, they must run a good household, devoting much of their time to domestic matters since their role is greater.^{viii}

While Jefferson believes a well ordered home will lead to success in his daughter's lives, he also sees a well ordered home representing a well-ordered country. Beginning in 1785, he writes letters from France to Abigail Adams, the wife of political friend John Adams, while he served as the American foreign minister in England. Early in their correspondence Abigail requests Jefferson send items for her home in London. Jefferson procures "three plateaux de dessert with a silvered balustrade round them, and four figures of Biscuit." Later, he draws up an expense report, including a damask tablecloth and napkins, nutcrackers, and Irish linens among other items. These items help Adams make her temporary home a showing place for delegates that visit. He hopes this will show off American values: "This will do, thinks I, for the table of the American Minister in London, where those whom it may concern may look and learn that though Wisdom is our guide, and the Song and Chase our supreme delight, yet we offer adoration to that tutelary god also who rocked the cradle of our birth." In this explanation,

Jefferson not only talks about representing America, but also representing the women of America. By displaying a beautiful table setting showing “Wisdom” as America’s guide, Jefferson attempts to pay homage to the “tutelary god...who rocked the cradle of our birth,” or the British. Adams, as the minister’s wife, represents American women, and thus America because her job is to upkeep the house. Both Jefferson and Adams understand this as he gives her these items because it will make her look successful domestically.^{ix}

Socially, Jefferson also has a prescribed set of rules that he knows are important to the success of women in society, along with what makes them successful domestically. Jefferson writes an advice letter to Martha who is about ten or eleven years old in 1783. Jefferson, a member of Congress and away from his home in Virginia, tells his daughter to “practice music,” “dance one day and draw another,” and “read French...English, write.” He also tells her “it produces great praise to a lady to spell well. I have placed my happiness on seeing you good and accomplished.” The father Jefferson takes pride in knowing his daughter is well rounded and accomplished, prepared for her future life raising an accomplished family. No political speech is needed because he does not expect this from his daughter.^x

Jefferson’s social beliefs appear in his correspondences with Maria Cosway. Jefferson forms a strong attachment to Cosway while in France, writing letters to her after she and her husband move to England in 1786. As Jefferson returns from vacation in Italy, he wishes she accompanied him to the “many enchanting scenes which only wanted your pencil to consecrate them to fame...But have your pallet and pencil ready: for you will be sure to stop in the passage, at the château de Saorgio...I insist on your painting it.” Jefferson wishes her to be there because she is an accomplished artist, and Cosway’s talents compare to what he asks of Martha. To Jefferson, a woman who can express herself artistically or in more docile matters not requiring

her to do anything overtly political (debate, research, etc.) is a woman that will find success and happiness in her life.^{xi}

Through direct advice, and wish for Cosway, Jefferson shows his desire for women to be educated and accomplished. But, nowhere does he mention their role in the public sphere. It appears that Jefferson believes a proper woman can express herself artistically, or in a matter that does not make her seem too outspoken. To compare that with his view of women's domestic role, Jefferson wants women to be always active and engaged in only feminine matters. So, women can express themselves artistically by painting, writing, and drawing. But, these must never cross over into the realm of political discussion, as he just wants Cosway to paint landscapes so he can look at them over again. As with his daughters, the same can be assumed since he already has implicitly stated his desire for them to be successful in every facet of life except where they do not belong or will not thrive: politics.

Politics appears in the correspondences Jefferson has with both Cosway and Abigail Adams. He does speak to Adams about politics, including problems in America and policy issues since she shows herself to be well versed in the political matters of the time. Cosway, a British artist and Jefferson's love interest, is not known for her view on politics. Their correspondence is marked by enthusiasm over what each does, discussions about their mutual acquaintances, and also by an increasing insistence that the other one write more often, but little political discussion. Women did not play a noticeable role in the politics of post-revolution America, and Jefferson does not appear to ask advice from either of these women. He selects what he talks about and whom he talks about it with, as he only discusses politics with a woman he considers worthy enough to do so.^{xii}

The Jefferson-Adams correspondence begins with a discussion of America in 1785. Jefferson engages Adams in a discussion of America by asking, “what do the foolish printers of America mean by retailing all this stuff in our papers? As if it was not enough to be slandered by one’s enemies without circulating the slanders among his friends also.” He also requests information from Adams, stating that “my intelligence from America lately has become more defective than it formerly was” due to the slow travel of his French mail carriers. Adams’ response to this discussion is, “so we may too late convince this Nation that the Treasure which they knew not how to value, has irrecoverably past into the possession of those who were possesst (sic) of more policy and wisdom.” This jab towards the British begins the start of a certain style of discourse between the two. He can discuss with her what the French and British papers are saying about America because they can both weigh in on it. He allows this, it seems, because it enables him to discuss matters about his native country while away.^{xiii}

The discourse on particular events in America, most notably that of Shays Rebellion in Massachusetts in 1786 and 1787, pits Adams and Jefferson in a political debate over an American issue out of their control. In Shays Rebellion, an uprising against the government’s tax collection on farmers in the state of Massachusetts, farmers lost much of their lands, unable to pay back ever-increasing debt. The rebels sought to close the courts in Massachusetts, thus stopping the courts’ ability to take land away from farmers. Adams, a native of Massachusetts, is agitated by these events, while the cause of the rebellion speaks to Jefferson’s political past. He downplays this “little rebellion,” stating that “the spirit of resistance to government (is)... so valuable on certain occasions.” Jefferson does not necessarily support the rebellion, but being heavily involved in the politics of the American Revolution, understands the need to fight against oppression. Adams has her own take in a January 1787 letter, calling the rebels “ignorant,

wrestless desperadoes, without conscience or principals.” She then continues to argue with Jefferson stating the absence of “that laudible spirit which you approve, which makes a people watchfull over their Liberties and alert in the defence of them.” In a February 1787 letter, Jefferson appears tired of discussing the rebellion with Adams, and attempts to close the conversation. He says, “I shall have heard something of their proceedings worth communicating to Mr. Adams.” Although he discusses this with Abigail Adams, it appears he wants to cease speaking about it altogether as he says little about the rebellion with John Adams in subsequent letters. The fact that he defers to a male could be seen as an insult, but this also stays consistent with his ability to be dominant in a conversation. If he wishes to stop talking about it, Abigail Adams must acquiesce. Overall, this entire debate shows that Jefferson did not shy away from discussing political matters with Abigail Adams, although he does interject his own opinions more than respond to what she says.^{xiv}

Multiple instances occur where Jefferson attempts to understand where Adams stands politically. In doing so, he still controls the topic of conversation and length of the discussion. He talks again about America, as he says in July 1787 “I do not presume to write you news from America, because you have it so much fresher and frequenter than I have.” Here, he can deflect any arguments about America away, conceding a lack of information about it. In the same letter he asks her, “What think you of present appearances in Europe? The Emperor and his subjects?”^{xv} This is a possible reference to the *Assemblées des notables*; a French assembly called in 1787, made up of princes, deputies of provinces, and other French nobles. The financial crisis, and distrust of the king, caused a rift amongst these groups on how to handle labor and trade reform, ultimately culminating in the French Revolution in 1789.^{xvi} In another instance, Jefferson begins a conversation about “the king and parliament are at extremities about

the stamp act, the latter refusing to register it without seeing accounts etc.” This stamp tax apparently would affect the price of the letters Jefferson sends, but the French government ultimately decides against it. These examples of Jefferson reaching out to Adams for her opinion come unprovoked by her throughout their correspondence, although at random and with little, if any, follow up discussion.^{xvii}

Perhaps most important for this study are the reasons why Jefferson speaks to Adams about political matters. Mutual respect is one factor for their political discussions. As explained earlier, civilized conventions ruled letters such as these, but Jefferson appears to take it to another level with Adams. As Abigail and John Adams prepare for their trip back to America in February of 1788, Jefferson lets her know how he feels about their friendship. He wishes she would “continue to honour [him] with [her] correspondence,” once she returns to America. He also wishes for a “pleasant and safe passage,” for her, and “a happy meeting” with her friends. He asks her to “not let them so entirely engross you as to forget that you have one here who is with the most sincere esteem and attachment Dear Madam,” stating his respect for her.^{xviii}

Jefferson even maintains his respect for her during his rift with John Adams caused by the Judiciary Act of 1801 and the build-up to the 1800 Presidential election. This Act, the signing of judges by Adams, “reduced the membership of the Supreme Court to five, increased the number of district judges, and relieved the Supreme Court justices from traveling the circuit.” John Adams “appointed Federalists to these new positions to the discomfiture of his successor,” Jefferson, before leaving office, giving them the title of ‘midnight judges.’ Adams’s motive to do this stemmed from a need to reorganize the circuit court system, something overshadowed by other political matters during his presidency. Jefferson sought to repeal this law after his presidency, seeking political unity.^{xix} Although Jefferson’s anger is directed at John’s political

motivations, he admits in a letter to Abigail in July of 1804 “tho connected with political events, it has been viewed by me most strongly in its unfortunate bearings on my private friendships.”

Jefferson and Adams proceed to send letters back and forth discussing their disagreements.

Jefferson ends his discussion on these topics by reiterating what he had told her over a decade and a half earlier. As he attempts to clear his name of any wrongdoings, he turns it back on her saying “I hope you will see these intrusions on your time to be, what they really are, proofs of my great respect for you.”^{xx}

Overall, Jefferson deflects much of what Adams has to say on political matters, but still allows her to speak her mind. Adams states her beliefs throughout their correspondence, and appears to be well informed on many topics. But she knows her limited role in politics, stating she, “bear(s) no malice I cherish no enmity. I would not retaliate if I could,” when it comes to arguing with Jefferson. Contemporary conventions allow him to say what he needs with the knowledge that he does not have to justify his self to her, but respect allows him to even discuss politics in the first place. She becomes more than just a domestic icon, but someone he can open up to as well.^{xxi}

Jefferson’s relationship with Cosway elicits a different kind of discourse, resulting in little discussion on non-domestic issues. Where Adams is the wife of a political friend, Cosway appears as a love interest. While Adams has an understanding of what her husband does, Cosway has no ties to the political realm, as she and her husband are both artists. Therefore, Jefferson talks to Cosway about different topics than he would Adams. But, while both women attempt to discuss politics with him, he avoids the topic with Cosway. Although Cosway is a European-born woman, Jefferson’s responses to her still follow the given rules and conventions he uses towards American women of this time, using this style to elude political debates.

As already mentioned, the Jefferson-Cosway correspondence does not stray far from common courtesies and explanations of current happenings in each other's lives. Eventually, Cosway attempts to understand why Jefferson will not speak to her on matters of governmental importance. Although not entirely clear, she may feel the need to talk to him about political matters and to speak out for women in general. In a February 1787 letter, she wrote:

Of all the torments, temptations, and weariness, the female has always been the principal and most powerful object, and this is to be the most feared by you at present... Are you to be...tormented by the shadow of a woman who will present you a deformed rod, twisted and broken, instead of the emblematical instrument belonging to the Muses, held by Genius, inspired by wit, from which all that is pleasing, beautiful and happy can be described to entertain, and satisfy a mind capable of investigating every minutia of a lively imagination and interesting descriptions.

Although not necessarily political, Cosway senses Jefferson's displeasure with discussing issues concerning the government with her and she fights back, seeming to attack him and his beliefs on the matter. Cosway almost demands her worthiness to discuss politics as much as anyone else, that in fact all women are equal intellectually. In his next letter, in July of 1787, he does not respond to this. Jefferson only wishes she were with him on his trip to Italy, keeping her mind off politics and onto painting.^{xxii}

Later, as Jefferson prepares to leave Paris in 1789, Cosway again attempts to see if he will speak with her about politics, and again sees him side step the issue. She opens a discussion about British politics, saying, "I agree with you in many things (regarding a thousand objections against the caprices of this nation, I am disgusted by them day to day. Self-interested sentiments,

selfishness in politics, with scandal which reigns without the least regard for personages, circumstances, humanity, and right or wrong).” This time, she tries to find common ground with him by saying she agrees with him on many topics. But, again, Jefferson’s next letter forestalls a debate with her by talking about his impending return trip to America. He explains to her, “All is politics in this capital. Even love has lost its part in conversation,” a short reference to current happenings of the revolution in France, following it up by saying, “I am going to a country where (love) is felt in its sublimest degree.” Although still political, he does not launch into a discussion with her, even though they have much to commiserate upon. This marks an avoidance of goings on in Europe or America that do not conform to what he wants to discuss.^{xxiii}

This theme continues towards the end of the Jefferson-Cosway correspondence, as he does remain willing to discuss matters of seeming importance to him, but only in passing and under his own terms. For example, the short talks about the French Revolution continue into July of 1789, as he tells her “we have been here in the midst of tumult and violence. The cutting off heads is become so much a la mode, that one is apt to feel of a morning whether their own is on their shoulders.” This appears to be only in passing, and he does not solicit much of a response out of her. This could be because he asks her, “But why should I talk of wars and revolutions to you who are all peace and goodness.” This gives a reason for his reluctance to speak on political matters with her in the first place. Politics is a rough world, not meant for the feminine character of Cosway, according to Jefferson. He claims he does not wish to burden or upset her with this information, so he will seldom talk about it. Thus, he is able to stay dominant in the conversation, speaking about what he wants to speak about, and hinting that she is not right for political topics of discussion.^{xxiv}

Jefferson remains eager to discuss America with Cosway, though there is no political discussion such as seen in the Adams-Jefferson correspondence. Instead, Jefferson feels he must describe America to Cosway since she has never been there. He mainly talks about the beauty of America and how she should go with or visit him. He tells her on one occasion “there is not a country on earth where there is greater tranquility, where the laws are milder, or better obeyed...more hospitality treated, and with a more sacred respect.” Later, before he leaves, he calls on her again to use her artistic talents, telling her, “There you will find original scenes, scenes worthy of your pencil, such as the Natural bridge or the Falls of Niagara.” Here, Jefferson not only keeps the topic away from politics, but again encourages her to come with him and draw the landscape, her duty according to Jefferson.^{xxv}

What are the differences between these two women, and why does Jefferson write to Adams about politics, albeit under his own rules, and not Cosway? One could look at the issue of respect, as Jefferson professing his respect towards Adams follows up any debate they have. Thus, does Jefferson not respect Maria Cosway as he does Abigail Adams? The answer here is that he has a different kind of respect for Cosway. He has a great admiration for her, but relates closer to her on an emotional level than an intellectual connection, as he told her “were the hand able to follow the effusions of the heart, that would cease to write only when this shall cease to beat.” Adams is apt to know more about political matters, or presumably understands what he means when he talks politics with her. Cosway, on the other hand, does not have a political background. She cannot respond to a discussion of America because she has not been there. Therefore, he can tell her about it, but decides not to say much more. It also seems he speaks politics to a woman who knows the political environment of a certain place and only if he wants to talk about it. If not, he knows that he can talk about what he wants because as a male he

remains dominant in a conversation and knows the traditional submissive woman will respond anyway. The discourse between Jefferson and Cosway and Jefferson and Adams reveals his willingness to discuss any matter with women within the framework of the socially constructed behaviors of eighteenth century America.^{xxvi}

To take a look at the social roles of women in America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century helps to understand Jefferson's beliefs about women creating the perfect domestic home as a key to a useful life. Women did have different roles than men during this time period, taking on a more domestic posture in society. But, the topic of women's roles was becoming a changing subject due to the onset and conclusion of the American Revolution. In Edith Gelles' essay "A Virtuous Affair: The Correspondence Between Abigail Adams and James Lovell," she argues, "No longer is it possible to ignore the fact that women, too, participated in the American Revolution, though their voices resonated differently"^{xxvii}

Historian Mary Beth Norton validates Gelles argument in her article on "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America." Norton contrasts "the first one hundred seventy-five years of Anglo-American history" where "environmental conditions forced women to concentrate energies on the domestic sphere." But, the fight for American independence brought a change in women's roles "because it broke the traditional colonial molds of politics, religion, and the family, hastened the onset of change." She also argues "the older stress on domesticity continued, and indeed took on new life."^{xxviii} Therefore, the old idea of a domestic female role developed with a new outlook of how women should act in society. She explains a new interest in women forming from a "combination of wartime experiences and republican ideology," and a divide formed when "patriotic women supported the war effort along with their menfolk; Americans were thus forced to discard the traditional notion that women had no

connection to the public sphere and accordingly needed no civic education.” From the republican ideological views of the new nation came this new social ideal that this generation “became the first to define a public role for American women.”^{xxxix} Women had thus established themselves during the revolution to be members of public society, and their role as domestic caretaker remained the same as their role in society began to grow in importance, jibing with Jefferson’s earlier advice to his daughters.^{xxx}

This new public role for women meant increased responsibilities for a new American society, led by many of Jefferson’s colleagues after the war. Norton shows that “the ideal American woman was to be the nurturant (sic), patriotic mother who raised her children, and especially her sons, to be good Christians, active citizens, and successful competitors in the wider arena of life.”^{xxxi} Women now have an increased role in society, showing not only their role as mothers but also teachers for a next generation of Americans.^{xxxii} Norton goes on to explain that, “A successful republic, it was believed, required virtuous families-and women, in their maternal capacity, would ensure the existence of those virtuous families.” The republican mother, although still domestic and relegated to the matters of the home, “was to sacrifice herself to the family, freeing her husband and sons to express their individualism to the fullest.” Again, this references Jefferson’s wish that his daughters be well-rounded women capable of teaching the next generation of Americans.^{xxxiii}

In summation of her argument, Norton shows how the evolution of gender roles led to an increased importance for republican women in the future. Whereas “gender roles in the colonies were mutually exclusive...men's and women’s functions necessarily overlapped in a society based on a household economy.” Therefore, during and after the revolution women took on a more patriarchal role in the absence of men giving them an opportunity to take charge of the

entire household.^{xxxiv}

Women of this time experienced greater autonomy as well as a greater sense of their role as domestic providers and caregivers. Also, women were faced with a role that was ever-changing and required more responsibilities. Although they still strayed from the political domain, the goal of freedom extended to them as well. Jefferson did not appear to wield his dominance as a male so freely, but did grow up during a time when these roles for women were not as clearly defined. But, that does not stop him from advising his daughters as to the best way for them to be successful in their domestic roles. Therefore, he can see Abigail Adams as a ‘republican mother’ with knowledge of political matters because of her husband. In contrast to Adams, Cosway is European and cannot be seen as a republican mother. Thus, Jefferson sees her as unknowledgeable and maybe not as revolutionary in her ways of thinking.

One way to compare Jefferson’s approach to women is to look at the flirtatious epistolary Abigail Adams had with Congressman James Lovell between the years 1777 and 1782 while John Adams was away in Europe. This correspondence is unique because it “violated the ordinary eighteenth-century standards of formal discourse between a man and woman who were virtual strangers to each other. A pattern emerges...which illustrates the imbalance of the relationship between man and woman that characterized gender politics” at this time. Even a cursory look at Gelles data from the Lovell-Adams letters shows the similarities to the Jefferson-Adams correspondence. If the ideal of the republican mother is what she had to aspire to, then “her independent reputation derives from her letter writing,” as Adams’ independent personality makes each correspondence different^{xxxv}

Letter writing and correspondences were, for the most part, a study in gender politics and power relationships for men and women. In the Lovell-Adams correspondence, Lovell plays

“the part of flirtatious male with her, a part that inherently negotiates for power,” posing an, “aggressive, dominant, male stance,” by flirting “in an effort to force Adams into a submissive female position,”^{xxxvi} showing how women should take a submissive role and respond if spoken to.^{xxxvii} Adams does this with Jefferson, albeit in a much more natural way. On the topic of respect, Jefferson and Lovell differ much in their way of conveying respect for her. Lovell tells her early in their discourse of his “affectionate esteem for (her). Nor will I mention the whole.” Conventions at this time taught “to esteem an unfamiliar person is entirely within the scope of acceptable discourse, but ‘affectionate esteem’ for a stranger so violates propriety” so much that Gelles believes Adams may have been unsettled by the remark.^{xxxviii} There are numerous instances in which Lovell breaks away from the normal conventions of male-female letter writing. Where he “teased,” and persists “in a series of outrageously flirtatious remarks” to the point that Adams calls him a “flatterer,”^{xxxix} Gelles argues, “Adams might have encouraged the flirtation. Perhaps any one of her tactics might be interpreted as coyness, of encouraging his advance in a subtle manner, a maneuver used by women to negotiate power with men.” Adams does this with Lovell because she wants information about John while he is away. Jefferson by contrast continues politely, saying “I have received duly the honor of your letter, and am now to return you thanks for your condescension in having taken the first step for settling a correspondence which I so much desired.”^{xl} She does not appear to flirt with Jefferson because the two do not appear to have any other motive than to speak to each other as friends.^{xli}

Gelles comes to the conclusion that male-female friendship in the eighteenth century was complicated due to these conventions that negotiated for power; “That the status of women in late eighteenth century was subordinate to men is no revelation.” She then asks, “Could women and men be friends?”^{xlii} An answer comes within the Adams-Jefferson letters, as Jefferson had

no ulterior motives to talk to Adams other than just as a friend. He may have controlled what the two spoke about, but he did not go to such great lengths to establish his power as Lovell did. Gelles concludes, “what the Lovell correspondence reveals in most crass terms is the ultimate resort to which men turn to insure a dominant power relationship with women—sexual aggression, in this case with language,” and this appears to be true as it marks a unique difference between Lovell’s and Jefferson’s correspondences with Adams.^{xliii}

Even in Jefferson’s letters to Cosway does he refrain from going overboard or breaking convention like Lovell. It does not seem to matter what Lovell said to Adams anyway, as Gelles believes that “If equality of status was difficult to achieve in a correspondence, this imbalance reflected the ethos, the social behavior of the eighteenth century...Abigail would never concede in this kind of gender power struggle.” Adams just wanted information, and nothing more. As Gelles puts it, unlike the Adams-Lovell correspondence, Adams and Jefferson’s letters do not show “a struggle over dominance and subordination.” It is clear that Jefferson was not as radical in his approach to discussing politics with women. He had no motives other than to discuss matters at hand and keep an ongoing discourse with a friend he respected. The manner in which he did it is another topic, as he does seem to hold power over Adams and Cosway. Jefferson’s show of power is different and for a different purpose, and does not appear to be out of sync with the way the rest of society operated at the time.^{xliv}

Jefferson respected the women he spoke to and did not appear to behave differently from the norm of his generation. Thus, it would be careless to call him a sexist, considering the time period and the roles already set for women. Although not a feminist or women’s rights activist, it would also be false to say that he did little to improve the position of women in society. It appears he did what was necessary to help his daughters succeed in the vocations they chose.

Albeit taking almost directly from what Welter explains about ‘true womanhood,’ Jefferson’s conversations with his daughters intend to help them fit that role. Socially, and domestically, Jefferson knows a woman’s role. He cannot rightly tell his daughters to act politically because women did not do that at this time.

As a product of his generation, Jefferson did discuss politics, albeit briefly with woman who he both respected and knew were properly informed. He sees Adams role in politics increased since the revolution, and understands that she too has a say in what happens in America. Thus, he sees her as the embodiment of the ‘republican mother ideal.’ Conversely, it would be hard for Jefferson to see Cosway in this same light. As a European, she does not live up to the same standards as other American women in his eyes. She can only satisfy a non-political need with the non-political respect he shows her.^{xlv}

Jefferson speaks to Cosway, Adams, and his daughters in a gentlemanly fashion, not too radical or over the top, nor did he seek to punish or make women feel unworthy of a discourse with him. This contrasts to Lovell, who broke tradition with a more flagrant style of speech. Therefore, it is easy to understand Jefferson’s ascendancy through the world of politics even during times that he seemed most reluctant to stay involved in it. He internalized these rules of society and type of speech because these things made him most effective politically.

As a social history, this study shows once Jefferson comes to power in 1801, women’s roles are changing and becoming more of a topic in American society. Women are experiencing greater autonomy, and with that more power and influence within society. Jefferson does not necessarily encourage this increased role, nor does he discourage it either, allowing American women to experience more freedom during his time as president than they previously had before 1801. Although his laissez-faire attitude towards women role in politics helped to delay full

women's suffrage into the twentieth century, to attack Jefferson's democratic principles and to say he actively kept women out of politics does not account for the fact that at this point the social gender roles in America did not allow women to take on a political pose.

ⁱ Arthur Scheer, "Thomas Jefferson's "poor women": A symbol of sentiment of social inequality?" *The Midwest Quarterly*, 39, 3. (April 1998). 329.

Scheer's study looks into the alleged beliefs of Jefferson's social inequalities, among other issues, that historians use to attack his supposed 'democratic principles,' stating what he said did not agree with what he actually believed. The objective of Scheer's and this essay attempt to give legitimacy to Jefferson as a democratic philosopher, showing that his responses to women have nothing to do with his overall political beliefs. If anything, this shows how he may have struggled to adapt to new conventions for women after the American Revolution.

ⁱⁱ Randolph C. Benson, *Thomas Jefferson as Social Scientist*. (Rutherford: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971).

Virginia Scharff, *The Women Jefferson Loved*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010).

These documents relate to the topic of Thomas Jefferson social responses and inequalities.

Scharff's book is another look at the topics looked at in this essay.

Scheer, "Thomas Jefferson's "poor women." 329.

'Other historians' refers to the attacks by historians that Scheer responds to in his entire article.

John P. Kaminski, ed. *Jefferson In Love: The Love Letters Between Thomas Jefferson & Maria Cosway*. (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1999),12.

ⁱⁱⁱ Edith B. Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair: The Correspondence Between Abigail Adams and James Lovell," *American Quarterly*, 39. 2 (Summer 1987), 253, JSTOR. (accessed October 29, 2010).

Gelles is referencing Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's study focusing on late eighteenth-century and nineteenth century people discussing intimacy among female correspondents. See Smith-Rosenberg, "*The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America, 1750-1800.*" (Boston 1980).

^{iv} Kaminski, *Jefferson In Love*, 49.

^v "The Grand Recipe for Felicity," *Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826. Letters*, University of Virginia Library. Web. (Accessed September 21 2010).

< <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefLett.html> >.

Letter to Martha Jefferson.

^{vi} "Whippoorwills and Strawberries," *From Revolution to Reconstruction: The Letters of Thomas Jefferson: 1743-1826*. University of Groningen. Updated September 14, 2010. Web. (Accessed September 21, 2010).

<<http://odur.let.rug.nl/usa/P/tj3/writings/brf/jeflxx.htm>>.

Letter to Mary Jefferson.

^{vii} "Advice to a Young Daughter." *Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826. Letters*. University of Virginia Library. Web. (Accessed September 21 2010).

< <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefLett.html> >.

No information is given about Mrs. Hopkinson except she is in charge of looking after Martha while Jefferson is away. Jefferson also lays out his agenda explained in Endnote 11, and says to pursue it if Hopkinson approves.

Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18, 2. (Summer 1966). 152

^{viii} Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *The American Historical Review*. 89. 3 (June, 1984), 615, JSTOR. (Accessed November 1, 2010). Mary Beth Norton's interpretation of women in a post war society also attempts to show their importance in the realm of politics, something that will be discussed later in this study.

^{ix} Lester J. Cappon, ed. *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971, c1959). 69-70.

^x "Advice to a Young Daughter." University of Virginia Library.

Thomas Jefferson's advice to his daughter Martha.

^{xi} Kaminski, *Jefferson in Love*. 88.

^{xii} Cappon's book, the collection of letters from the University of Virginia, and the collection of letters from the University of Groningen all show that Jefferson kept correspondence with limited women. Abigail Adams, Maria Cosway, and his daughters are the most prevalent of these women, as that is the reason for their inclusion in this essay.

^{xiii} Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 70, 98, 80.

The first quote is from the letter dated September 25th, 1785 on page 70. The second quote is from the letter dated November 20th, 1785 on page 98. The third is Adams' letter dated October 7th, 1785 on page 80.

^{xiv} Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 166, 173.

As the editor of the collection of letters explains, "The cry for paper money, the stopping of the courts, the demand for republican of debts, the threat of mob rule, agitated Mrs. Adams to a high pitch."

Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 168.

This entire passage of Abigail's argument and rebuttal to Jefferson's statement comes from the letter on page 168, dated January 27th, 1787.

Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 173, 174-177.

Jefferson's letters to John Adams dated February 23rd and 28th of 1787 mention John Adams' book *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, and what he can do to improve them. This relates to Shays Rebellion only in how Massachusetts state constitution is written, and its release in America during the rebellion.

^{xv} Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 180.

This entire thought can be found in Jefferson's letter to Abigail in the letter on page 180, dated July 1st, 1787.

^{xvi} Vivian R. Gruder, "Paths to Political Consciousness: The Assembly of Notables of 1787 and the 'Pre-Revolution' in France," *French Historical Studies*, 13, 3. (January 21, 1984).

^{xvii} Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 188.

From Jefferson's letter to Abigail Adams on July 16th, 1787.

Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 191

From the letter of Jefferson to John Adams from July 23rd, 1787, apparently part of the taxes brought on by the French emperor during the *Assemblées des notables*. Jefferson states, "The

parliament are obstinately decided against the stamp tax. Their last remonstrance is said to be a master peice (sic) of good sense and firmness.”

^{xviii} Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 222.

This entire passage can be referenced from Jefferson’s letter to Abigail from the letter on page 222, dated February 2nd, 1788.

^{xix} Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 270.

These quotes come from the Jefferson letter to Abigail on page 270, dated from Washington on June 13th, 1804.

^{xx} Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 271, 280.

July 1st, 1804 letter on page 271. The latter quote is from September 11th, 1804 letter concluded on page 280.

^{xxi} Cappon, *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. 274.

^{xxii} Kaminski, *Jefferson in Love*. 83.

Same as the letter explained in Endnote 24.

^{xxiii} Kaminski, *Jefferson in Love*. 119.

From Cosway’s letter to Jefferson dated February 6th, 1789.

Kaminski, *Jefferson in Love*, 121.

Jefferson’s response letter to Cosway dated May, 21st, 1789.

^{xxiv} Kaminski, *Jefferson in Love*. 122.

All quotes preceding in this passage come from Jefferson’s letter to Cosway from page 122, dated July 25th, 1789.

Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 161-162.

Here, Welter’s discussion about submissiveness becomes relevant.

^{xxv} Kaminski, *Jefferson in Love*. 51-52, 115.

The first quote in the paragraph is from page 51-52 (letter dated October 12th, 1786), while the second quote is from page 115 (letter dated September 26th, 1788).

^{xxvi} Kaminski, *Jefferson in Love*. 72.

Jefferson’s emotional “effusions” come from his letter dated November 19th, 1786.

Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 161.

As Welter shows in her study that women’s publications like *The Lady’s Token* told women that, “A wife should occupy herself ‘only with domestic affairs—wait till your husband confides to you those of a high importance—and do not give your advice until he asks for it.’”

^{xxvii} Gelles, “A Virtuous Affair,” 252.

^{xxviii} “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America.” Norton. 619.

This passage refers solely to page 619 of Norton’s study.

^{xxix} “The Evolution of White Women’s Experience in Early America.” Norton. 616.

The three preceding quotes come from this page of Norton’s study.

^{xxx} James Oliver Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke: Gender Conventions among Antebellum Free Blacks,” *Feminist Studies*, 12, 1. (Spring 1986). 64.

Horton explains in his article how black women were constrained by the problems that already limited the success of white women directly after emancipation.

“The limitations under which all blacks labored brought poverty that made it impossible for black women to be “true women” in the full nineteenth-century sense of that term, and the limitations imposed on women combined with those on blacks to all but foreclose the possibility of an enterprising woman becoming a true economic success. The black woman was then

trapped by pressures from her community, from the wider society, and from the economic reality of her times.”

^{xxx} Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," 617.

^{xxxii} James Oliver Horton, "Freedom's Yoke," 57.

Showing how this relates to white women, Horton explains how black women take on this role, a gender convention for all women, after emancipation.

"Mothers were to play the dominant role in this aspect of the child's education. For this reason the black woman was urged to spend significant amounts of time with her children and to improve her mind so that knowledge might be available to the young."

^{xxxiii} Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," 618, 617.

First quote from page 618, while the latter is from page 617.

^{xxxiv} Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," 618.

^{xxxv} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 254.

^{xxxvi} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 256, 263.

^{xxxvii} Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 161.

This is in reference to the quotation used in Endnote 30.

^{xxxviii} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 255.

This quote and the quote preceding it come from page 255 of Gelles' study.

^{xxxix} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 255, 259.

^{xl} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 264.

^{xli} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 259.

^{xlii} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 263.

This quote and the quote preceding it come from page 263 of Gelles' study.

^{xliii} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 264.

^{xliv} Gelles, "A Virtuous Affair," 265, 264.

^{xlv} Reference to Jefferson's statement with Abigail Adams in Endnote 13