

Read the article “Women Who Shaped the Constitution” before answering Numbers 46 through 56.

Women Who Shaped the Constitution



BY ROSALYNN CARTER

REVOLUTIONARIES

When the Founding Fathers met in Philadelphia in 1787 to draft the Constitution, they did not have women’s rights on their minds. They did not grant women the right to vote or a voice in the government that was being formed. There was a simple reason for this neglect: both the Constitution and the Bill of Rights were based on an eighteenth-century concept of justice and equality that was an exclusively white, male system of law and order. The Founding Fathers were simply the patriarchal¹ products of their time.

The prevailing thought of the day was that the American voter must be independent and uncoerced. Men without property could not be independent and uncoerced because they were vulnerable to their landlords. Married women were subject to their husbands’ wishes, so it followed that they could not be independent voters. Under this reasoning, one would think that unmarried propertied women would have the vote, but as John

Adams said, “You have to draw the line somewhere!”

Our Constitution was not perfect when it was signed; it is not perfect today. But our forefathers had the wisdom to make it possible for us to amend it. Thus, even without formal constitutional rights and lacking the right to vote throughout most of our history, the influence of women on the constitutional process, from the beginning, has been significant.

Who are these invisible women who struggled to protect our rights—or to demand them? They need to be remembered so they can be institutionalized as contributors to our democratic heritage.

Abigail Smith Adams is one of the few women of the eighteenth century who has remained in the public eye. There are several reasons for the continued interest in her life. Hundreds of the letters she wrote over her lifetime were preserved by her family. She also lived during an important era of American history and was related to famous

¹**patriarchal**: relating to a family, community, or society governed by men

men. Her husband, John Adams, was one of the founders of the nation and the second president of the United States. Her son, John Quincy Adams, was the sixth president, as well as a diplomat and member of Congress for more than two decades.

Abigail was a woman of her times and believed that a woman's role was domestic. But she was intelligent, self-educated, and articulate and could understand and comment upon political issues, as her letters show. And although she did not shape her husband's policies, her correspondence with him, as illustrated in the following excerpt, informs us of the desire of some women of that period to be included in affairs of state.



Abigail Adams to John Adams, as he sat at the Second Continental Congress, March 31, 1776.

[I]n the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice, or representation.



One woman who influenced the thinking of the day when the Constitution was being written was Mercy Otis Warren. She was born into a politically prominent family in Massachusetts, and at a time when

other females were learning flowery letter writing, she was sharing her brother's Harvard College classwork. She married a Massachusetts legislator who encouraged her involvement with public affairs, and she was known by most of the framers and founders of the Constitution, including George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Adams, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson. She corresponded with them about social and political issues, the ideals and ideas of the day.

During the growing protest among the Colonies against British rule, Warren and her husband were part of a small circle of patriots, including Samuel Adams, John Adams, and John Hancock, who met in their homes to exchange ideas about forming a government for this new country, debating the structure, function, and processes of colonial, confederate, and constitutional governments.

Although she never strayed far beyond Boston, Mercy Warren's extensive correspondence, satirical plays, poetry, and anti-Federalist tracts were read and discussed in all the states and in Europe. Her writings reflected on the very essences of liberty and democracy as she argued for the complete protection of human rights. She influenced the language of the Constitution even though she was not allowed to be present at the convention that adopted it. Influenced by her reading of John Locke and other Enlightenment philosophers, Warren once wrote that "man is born free and possessed of certain unalienable rights"—a principle now etched in the Declaration of Independence.

Now answer Numbers 46 through 56. Base your answers on the article "Women Who Shaped the Constitution."

46 What is the main idea of this article?

- F. Women have had political influence since the Revolutionary period.
- G. Women have accepted their political roles since the Revolutionary period.
- H. The Revolutionary period was a time when women achieved political equality.
- I. The Revolutionary period was a time when women increased their political power.

47 What is the author's point of view in this article?

- A. She favors women's rights.
- B. She opposes political families.
- C. She favors a patriarchal system.
- D. She opposes women in government.

48 What is the main idea of the first paragraph?

- F. The Constitution contained provisions for women's right to vote.
- G. Women's rights were not considered when the Constitution was drafted.
- H. The Founding Fathers came from similar economic and racial backgrounds.
- I. In 1787, women had no right to vote, but they did have a voice in government.

49 What is the meaning of the word *uncoerced* as used in this sentence from the second paragraph in the article?

The prevailing thought of the day was that the American voter must be independent and uncoerced.

- A. unbiased
- B. unconcerned
- C. uneducated
- D. unforced

50 Which phrase best describes participation in democratic government in the eighteenth century?

- F. available to some men
- G. available to citizens only
- H. available to some women
- I. available to property owners

53 Abigail Adams' letters are important today because they

- A. provide insight into early U.S. history.
- B. changed opinions of the Founding Fathers.
- C. influenced the language of the Constitution.
- D. established policy for John Adams' administration.

54 In his response to Abigail Adams' letter of March 31, 1776, John Adams wrote the following:

Your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented.

Based on information in Abigail Adams' letter, what is the "tribe" to which John Adams is referring?

- F. ancestors
- G. husbands
- H. ladies
- I. tyrants

The correct answer for each multiple-choice question is circled. To the left of each answer choice is the percentage of students who chose that answer.

46 What is the main idea of this article?

- 41% **F.** Women have had political influence since the Revolutionary period.
- 9% **G.** Women have accepted their political roles since the Revolutionary period.
- 23% **H.** The Revolutionary period was a time when women achieved political equality.
- 28% **I.** The Revolutionary period was a time when women increased their political power.

Content Focus	Content Difficulty
main idea	Moderate

47 What is the author's point of view in this article?

- 90% **A.** She favors women's rights.
- 1% **B.** She opposes political families.
- 4% **C.** She favors a patriarchal system.
- 4% **D.** She opposes women in government.

Content Focus	Content Difficulty
author's point of view	Moderate

48 What is the main idea of the first paragraph?

- 7% **F.** The Constitution contained provisions for women's right to vote.
- 82% **G.** Women's rights were not considered when the Constitution was drafted.
- 6% **H.** The Founding Fathers came from similar economic and racial backgrounds.
- 6% **I.** In 1787, women had no right to vote, but they did have a voice in government.

Content Focus	Content Difficulty
main idea	Moderate

- 49 What is the meaning of the word *uncoerced* as used in this sentence from the second paragraph in the article?

The prevailing thought of the day was that the American voter must be independent and uncoerced.

- 39% A. unbiased
10% B. unconcerned
5% C. uneducated
45% **D. unforced**

Content Focus	Content Difficulty
analyze words/text	Moderate

- 50 Which phrase best describes participation in democratic government in the eighteenth century?

- 37% **F. available to some men**
13% G. available to citizens only
15% H. available to some women
29% I. available to property owners

Content Focus	Content Difficulty
details/facts	Low

- 53 Abigail Adams' letters are important today because they

- 45% **A. provide insight into early U.S. history.**
24% B. changed opinions of the Founding Fathers.
22% C. influenced the language of the Constitution.
8% D. established policy for John Adams' administration.

Content Focus	Content Difficulty
validity and reliability	High

- 54 In his response to Abigail Adams' letter of March 31, 1776, John Adams wrote the following:

Your letter was the first intimation that another tribe, more numerous and powerful than all the rest, were grown discontented.

Based on information in Abigail Adams' letter, what is the "tribe" to which John Adams is referring?

- 10% E. ancestors
- 7% G. husbands
- 74% **H.** ladies
- 9% I. tyrants

Content Focus	Content Difficulty
synthesize information (multiple sources)	High