

Abigail Adams and John Adams Correspondence (1776)

5 *Abigail Adams was married to John, the Patriot leader and future U.S. President. Both were immensely intelligent and highly educated—qualities that they would pass on to their son John Quincy, sixth president of the U.S.*

10 *The following are passages from letters sent between the couple. The year is 1776: John and other Patriots were to sign the Declaration of Independence, while Abigail and others outside the proceedings watched developments and likewise wished to shape the meaning of “freedom” from British rule.*

From: Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776

15 I long to hear that you have declared an independency¹—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a
20 Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the
25 more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supream Being make use of that power only for our happiness.

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From: John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776

35 As to Declarations of Independency, be patient. Read our Privateering Laws, and our Commercial Laws. What signifies a Word.

As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, 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
40 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. This is rather too coarse a Compliment but you are so saucy, I wont blot it out.

¹ John would be one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

45 Depend upon it, We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems. Altho they are in full
Force, you know they are little more than Theory. We dare not exert our Power in its full
Latitude. We are obliged to go fair, and softly, and in Practice you know We are the subjects. We
have only the Name of Masters, and rather than give up this, which would compleatly subject Us
to the Despotism of the Peticoat, I hope General Washington, and all our brave Heroes would
fight.

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From: Abigail Adams to John Adams, May 7, 1776

55 I can not say that I think you very generous to the Ladies, for whilst you are proclaiming peace
and good will to Men, Emancipating all Nations, you insist upon retaining an absolute power
over Wives. But you must remember that Arbitrary power is like most other things which are very
hard, very liable to be broken—and notwithstanding all your wise Laws and Maxims we have it
in our power not only to free ourselves but to subdue our Masters, and without violence throw
both your natural and legal authority at our feet.

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"Charm by accepting, by submitting sway
Yet have our Humour most when we obey."

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Source: Massachusetts Historical Society
https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/browse/date/all_1776.php
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