Comparative Patriarchy
and American Institutions
This book is dedicated:

to Howard Zinn (1922-2010), a world-class educator, whose life serves as a template for intelligent compassion,

to Myriam Merlet (1953-2010), former Chief of Staff of the Haitian Ministry of Women and an outspoken radical feminist, who lost her life during the U.S. AID blockage following the January 12, 2010 earthquake which has taken more than 200,000 lives,

to Medea Benjamin and the brave American women of CODE PINK, whose proactive response to tyranny has been an inspiration to millions of us women, men, and children who desire a new world,

and

to the Viva Palestina Convoy and British Member of Parliament George Galloway, whose strong character in the face of pathological violence without purpose has saved the lives of thousands.
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FOREWORD

FRANCIS FEELEY

As this book goes to press in Cambridge, England, at the start of 2010, hate crimes, and particularly violence against women, is on the increase around the world. The current global economic crisis and the political fallout from this drastic destabilization has certainly contributed to the physical and psychological victimization of women and other vulnerable “power minorities.”

Toward the end of 2009, The World Health Organization, the coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system, issued a report in which it enumerated several of the problems related to violence against women:

- In a 10-country study on women's health and domestic violence conducted by WHO,
  - Between 15% and 71% of women reported physical or sexual violence by a husband or partner.
  - Many women said that their first sexual experience was not consensual. (24% in rural Peru, 28% in Tanzania, 30% in rural Bangladesh, and 40% in South Africa).
  - Between 4% and 12% of women reported being physically abused during pregnancy.
- Every year, about 5,000 women are murdered by family members in the name of honour each year worldwide.
- Trafficking of women and girls for forced labour and sex is widespread and often affects the most vulnerable.
- Forced marriages and child marriages violate the human rights of women and girls, yet they are widely practiced in many countries in Asia, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa.
- Worldwide, up to one in five women and one in 10 men report experiencing sexual abuse as children. Children subjected to sexual
abuse are much more likely to encounter other forms of abuse later in life.¹

A recently concluded five-year study in the United States by the Parents Television Council reports that graphic depictions of violence against women on prime time television, between 2004 and 2009, has increased dramatically. Other major finding from this study are:

1. Incidents of violence against women and teenage girls are increasing on television at rates that far exceed the overall increases in violence on television. Violence, irrespective of gender, on television increased only 2% from 2004 to 2009, while incidents of violence against women increased 120% during that same period.

   - The most frequent type of violence against women on television was beating (29%), followed by credible threats of violence (18%), shooting (11%), rape (8%), stabbing (6%), and torture (2%). Violence against women resulted in death 19% of the time.
   - Violence towards women or the graphic consequences of violence tends overwhelmingly to be depicted (92%) rather than implied (5%) or described (3%).

2. Every network but ABC demonstrated a significant increase in the number of storylines that included violence against women between 2004 and 2009.

3. Although female victims were primarily of adult age, collectively, there was a 400% increase in the depiction of teen girls as victims across all networks from 2004 to 2009.

4. Fox stood out for using violence against women as a punch line in its comedies—in particular Family Guy and American Dad—trivializing the gravity of the issue of violence against women.

5. From 2004 to 2009 there was an 81% increase in incidences of intimate partner violence on television.²

Tim Winter, President of Parents Television Council, and co-author of the PTC report, *WOMEN IN PERIL: A Look at TV’s Disturbing New Storyline Trend,* concludes from this study of violence in the United States that at the end of the first decade of this new century, America has become a country where more than 60% of children have been exposed to violence in their daily lives, according to recent research by Justice Department, [and that] we must take the utmost care not to normalize violent behavior – especially violence against women – through our television programming.3

The essays in this book offer descriptions and analyses of gender relationships in the United States and abroad. It is the thesis of this collection of essays that patriarchal systems of various types are and have always been a largely unconscious part of social space. Gender relationships serve to reinforce the social stratifications of class and ethnic/race divisions. Like juggling three balls in the air at the same time, an essential balance is created by directing prejudices against “powerless minorities” – women, racial and ethnic groups, and ordinary working people—so that they are successfully kept separated, in a state of “organized disorganization.”

I would like to thank the faculty and staff at The University of Savoy for providing the encouragement and financial support for the international conference on “Patriarchy,” that was held on the Chambery campus on April 18–20, 2007, where the ideas in these essays were first tested on a French audience, with the professional assistance of a team very competent interpreters: Mss. Sylvie Guillocheau, Harriet Leeck, Vanessa Lucidi, and Ildiko Virag Patocs, who were brought together for this occasion with the help of Jean-François Druhen-Charnaux.

Also, a special recognition is due to M. Christian Guillérè, Professor of History and Director of the Social Science Research Laboratory: *Langages, Littératures, Sociétés,* at The University of Savoy; as well as to M. Frédéric Méni, of Albany, New York; and Ms. Catherine Brun, and Ms. Marie-Ange Mayoussier, of Chambéry, for their indispensable oversight of the publication of the French-language edition of this book, which first appeared in June 2009. The 2007 conference at Chambery, from which these essays originate, was funded with the help Professor Guillérè’s *LLS* Laboratory at The University of Savoy and with the generous assistance of the Conseil Régional Rhône-Alpes, in Lyon.

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3 Ibid.
I conclude this Foreword with a very hearty thank you to Amanda Millar and Carol Koulikourdi, our publishers at Cambridge Scholars Publishing, for their enthusiasm and continual encouragement to make these important essays available to an English-language audience with the present edition of this book.

—Francis Feeley
Ile Verte, 15 January 2010
INTRODUCTION

FRANCIS FEELEY

The 1961 unabridged edition of *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, offers the following definition of the noun patriarchy: “[pā-trē-är-kē] (1) social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family in both domestic and religious functions, the legal dependence of wife or wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line.” The second definition is: “(2) a society so organized.” The etymology of the word itself dates from 1632, when the British monarch Charles I was beginning to have serious political problems with the Puritan merchant class in his kingdom. (This historic aspect of patriarchy is discussed in chapter 1 of this book.) In 2008, the *Merriam-Webster On-Line Dictionary* revised the 1961 meaning of the word to include as the first definition: “control by men of a disproportionately large share of power.” And to the second definition in 2008 is added: “a society or institution organized according to the principles or practices of patriarchy”. Thus we see between these two dates, 1961 and 2008, a shift in the definition from a narrow focus on the nuclear family and individual legal rights of inheritance, to an expanded definition which includes the governance of institutions other than the family.¹

My first conscious encounter with patriarchy dates back to my childhood experiences in South Texas. I grew up in a fatherless family and my mother, the youngest daughter of a small town newspaper editor, had herself never been successfully indoctrinated into accepting male supremacy. She became a high school librarian and was a fairly well-informed independent thinker, and when she died, at the age of 52, patriarchy had yet no meaning for me. In fact it was not even in my vocabulary.

An early and intense experience with patriarchal values came a few years later, in the summer of 1961. I was fifteen when I took a summer job

working as a box handler in a packing shed in Rio Grande City, Texas. It was a life in the bowels of hell, and I remember it as if it were yesterday: the smell of the dusty shed, the feel of the dry cardboard boxes, the colors that the various work teams wore, and the sound of Mexican music that blended into the rhythm of the conveyor belts that moved the boxes from the stapling machine area, through the box-preparation and packing area, where they were filled with ripe yellow cantaloupes or green honeydew melons, and carried on to the train platform where they were loaded into boxcars, soon to be hitched to trains and heading for New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and all points north of the border. The train tracks ran adjacent to the packing shed, where boxcars stood day and night, waiting to be filled with boxes of melons grown in the fields of the Rio Grande Valley, only a few miles from Mexico.

The packing shed was managed by a hierarchy of older white men, who kept the younger men, the women, and older men of color in their places by a continuous rhythm of hard routine work. The stratification of the labor force was maintained during these long hours of low-paid, seasonal work by imposing the usual separations of race, age, and gender. Many of the workers were under the age of 18 (I was, I believe, the youngest), and we were relegated to the lowest paid and dirtiest jobs, like folding dusty boxes, washing muddy melons, and picking up trash from the floor. Typically, the women and the young men received the lowest pay in each job category. The work force was mostly Hispanic male.

Young white women and occasionally a young Hispanic woman worked in the clean, air-conditioned office areas with older white men. But standing along the conveyor belts winding through the entire area of the packing shed were mostly men—some young white men, like myself; more older Hispanic men—and a few women. It was in this area that boxes were built and prepared for shipping, then conveyed to packers further down the assembly line who, standing behind their wooden tables, removed the boxes from the conveyor belt one at a time and filled it as quickly as possible with selected melons before returning it to the conveyor belt where it continued its journey in rhythmic procession down the assembly line though the sealing area, where each box was labeled and closed, on to the final leg of its journey to the platform, where the train cars stood waiting to be filled. The melon packers were paid by piece work and earned a higher income than most of us working in this hot shed, but the Hispanic women performing the same job received a lower rate of pay than the non-Hispanic men and women, and they let everyone working in the shed know. (This use of piece work and different pay scales, of course, created divisions among the melon packers, as well as between the packers
Francis Feeley

and the rest of us. The packers, because they were paid by the box, set the
tempo of work for the rest of us.) My job was to open the sheets of
cardboard and fold them into boxes at a rate of 8 or 10 per minute. I would
place each folded box on the post of a large stapling machine, and hold it
in place until the older man standing beside me took hold of it and stitched
the bottom of the box closed, threw it onto the conveyor belt, and reach
rhythmically for the next box awaiting him, folded and held in place on the
post of his stapling machine. It took several minutes for each empty box to
be prepared for packing with soft paper and cardboard dividers introduced
into the box as it moved from station to station, along the assembly line.
The whole procedure took about 20 minutes: from the moment the box
was built, then prepared, packed, labeled and sealed, and finally placed on
the platform next to the train car. In this way a constantly flow of boxes
passed through the shed, from daybreak to sunset, six days a week,
provided that the weather was good and the farm trucks were bringing in
the melons on time.

The managerial techniques employed to keep us working 12 and 15
hours a day that summer at a mind-numbing pace were rather simple.
Getting up at the crack of dawn, eating a quick breakfast before the truck
arrived to take us to work, a quick lunch at noon, and before you knew it
you were on your way home after dark for a fast bite to eat (if you had the
energy) before going to bed. I often skipped evening meals to get more
sleep.

This pernicious routine of managing hundreds of exhausted male and
female bodies and minds for hours on end, under a hot corrugated steel
roof, was stabilized by a flow of energy that never got out of control. Over
time (melon season extended from July to the end of August) we workers
formed bonds with each other (sometimes with real affection, more often
with loathing) but the nuances really didn’t matter. The essential concern
was that we got to work on time and that we worked at maximum
productivity all day long. The managers were usually successful in
maintaining a precarious equilibrium, and we never seriously thought of
organizing ourselves to resist this system of intense exploitation.

The system that governed our energies at the Rio Grande City packing
shed was put in place by a few white men. This method of being managed
came as an early revelation in my life. I had never seen men treat other
men and women like this before. The privileges enjoyed by the small
group of white males in this enterprise came at the price of having to
tolerate and at times actively collaborate with the sexist, racist, and ageist
tactics that successfully divided us.
The essays in this book on patriarchy in the United States --and the language, culture and politics of liberalism which it promotes-- offer readers many insights into the male-dominated world of institutions that govern the lives of some three hundred million people living in the most powerful nation of the world. These essays will also provide readers with a deeper understanding of the effects such social relationships have on societies throughout the rest of the world.\(^2\)

The first day of our conference was devoted to the subject of “The Reproduction of Traditions and the Shaping of Male/Female Consciousness.” We begin this discussion with topics taken from early American history. The publication of the essay presented by Francis Feeley in chapter 1, describing the role of women at the inception of the new republic and comparing the new relationships between men and women to what had existed in England and America in the preceding colonial period. Chapter 2 is the re-publication of an essay by D. H. Lawrence, originally written in 1923, in which he analyzes one of the most influential “founding fathers” of the Republic of the United States of America, Benjamin Franklin. This American icon, a self-described representative of “the self-made man,” has for generations been widely advertised as representing the essential

\(^2\) Sexist violence is perhaps the most wide spread violation of the “Rights of Man” and the most tolerated by society. Its cost to women, their children, families and communities represents an important obstacle to the reduction of poverty, to equality between the genders and to the realization of millennial objectives for development (OMD). Violence is a traumatic experience for every man and every woman, but sexist violence in the great majority of cases is inflicted on women and girls by men. It reflects and at the same time reinforces the inequalities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims.

It has been estimated that at the global level, one woman out of five in the course of her life will be the victim of rape or attempted rape. One woman in every three will have been beaten, forced to have sexual relations or victimized in some other manner, generally by a member of her family or by a person she knows. Most often, those responsible for these acts enjoy impunity. Each year, hundreds of thousands of women and children are victims of human trafficking and are reduced to slavery; thousands of others are subject of harmful practices. Violence kills and weakens as many women between the ages of 15 and 44 as does cancer. And the toll that it exacts on the health of women exceeds that of automobile accidents and malaria combined. Sources: http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/francais/ch7/index.htm, visited 22 December 2007, and http://lauraflanders.firedoglake.com/2009/11/26/turning-pain-to-power-change-in-the-congo-melody-gardot-indigenous-youth-delegation-to-palestine-2/, visited 27 November 2009.
character traits of Americans, especially American men. Lawrence’s acidic commentary on Franklin’s famous formula for self-help brings into focus our subsequent discussions of gender relationships in American institutions, both past and present. In chapter 3, Louise Kamara, a graduate student at l’Université de Savoie à Chambéry (2006-2007), describes the relationships between slave women, on the one hand, and men, both black and white, on the other. Chapter 4, by San Diego, California psychoanalyst, Dr. Caroline de Potté, describes her psychoanalytic studies of interpersonal relationships in the patriarchal society of Southern California, where the personal feelings of Envy are intensified in women sometimes causing deep anxieties and even passionate desires for revenge against the persons they believe to have admired traits or possessions.

Chapters 5 and 6 of this book concern the diversity of female responses to the reproduction process of patriarchal values in the context of everyday lives of ordinary women living in the Third World. Chapter 5 is a short essay by Ramzy Baroud, who teaches mass communication at Australia’s Curtin University of Technology, Malaysia Campus and here describes the “heroic actions” taken by Palestinian women on January 22, at Rafah, Egypt, where they led what is becoming known as “the greatest jailbreak in history,” demanding food, fuel and freedom in Gaza. In chapter 6, Chem edine Bouchehma, a graduate student at l’Université de Savoie à Chambéry (2006-2007), investigates the conditions facing American female soldiers in the patriarchal power pyramid of the United States military. He goes on to compare their tactics and strategies of survival with those adopted by third-world women, notably women living in Iraq and Algeria.

Chapter 7 is an essay by Howard University Professor Rebecca Reviere and Vernetta Young on fourth-world women in U.S. prisons and the effect male-oriented prison design has on these women during the time they spend in the institution and after their re-entry into society. In chapter 8, law Professor Peggy Smith, from the University of Iowa College of Law, discusses the American labor movement's ability to organize the working poor, despite apparent obstacles and she describes the long-term implications of this new wave of labor organizing for the economic empowerment of low-wage working women. And Professor Deborah Small of California State University at San Marcos reports in chapter 9 on the findings from her original fieldwork with Amerindian women in Southern California and northern Mexico. The indigenous people who occupy this region of North America represent cultural values that are directly dependant on the indigenous plants of the area. Today the very existence of their culture is at risk by urban development and the massive
use of industrial products that endanger the environment with which this population has lived in a symbiotic relationship for tens of thousands of years.

The second day of our conference was devoted to the subject of “Equality and Female Agents of Change.” On this second day a one-person play, “Louise Michel, Mémoires d’une femme,” was performed on the Chambéry campus by the Parisian actress, Marie Daude. The papers which were delivered after this extraordinary performance are found in chapters 10 through 11. This part of our book is devoted to discussions of lived inequality and modes of resistance to male supremacy, as well as proactive responses on the part of women living in the United States and in France. Chapter 10 by l’Université de Aix-Marseille Professor-Archivist Clotilde Chauvin is a report on her original research of an obscure moment in the life of Louise Michel, when in the fall of 1904, just months before her death, she visited Algeria and wrote about this “colonial hell”. Chapter 11, by the Breton Educator-Anarchist, Didier Giraud, is a tribute to Louise Michel, which offers his original insights into her enduring contributions to French culture. In chapter 12, l’Université de Bordeaux Professor Monique Surel-Tupin discusses the woman in French theatre—both as a subject and as an actor—and the causes for the dramatic increase in number of women entering the theatre profession since 1968.

In chapters 13 and 14, readers will find analytical descriptions of ideological formations emerging from the history of female experiences in France and the United States of America. University of California-Berkeley Professor Candace Falk describes, in chapter 13, the life and times of the Russo-American anarchist Emma Goldman, and discusses her defiance of the laws and conventions that governed the behavior of most American women of her day. And in chapter 14, Anthony Wilden, professor emeritus at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, analyzes how war is a reflection of male supremacy, and how the colonization of the female body and mind serves to reinforce male rapport de force relationships between men and competition and male dominance in general. Professor Wilden argues in this brief essay that the long history of military escalation can come to an end only if we take into account the need to change male-female relationships by acknowledging the illegitimacy of gender inequality which has governed our behavior until today.

The third and final theme in this international conference was “Women Against Reality” where we discussed past strategies used to achieve positive change. The last five chapters of this book are commentaries of this subject of women and ideology, with a special emphasis on strategies, tactics, and logistics for change. In chapter 15, Professor Rhonda Hammer
Francis Feeley

of University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA), analyzes the interrelationships connecting globalization to militarism and terrorism and the effects these combined relationships have on the formation of female character in the 21st Century. In chapter 16, Enrica Piccardo, discusses the incompatibility of humanist education and patriarchal schooling, where the education of “emotional intelligence” is systematically neglected and where early education, “nearer to the domain of mother care” is undervalued (and underpaid).

Chapter 17 is an essay by Hélène Marquié, a social science researcher at the Institut Emilie du Châtelet, who offers us a comparative analysis of the relationship between feminist theory and dance as it was produced in the United States and in France in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Marquié’s study is a unique effort to explain historic and theoretical differences between French and American schools of thought and the political impact these differences have had on gender research in France. In chapter 18, Grenoble poet, Giles Vachon, describes the socialization process of becoming a virtual “man” in a real male supremacist society, and how sometimes the template fails to reproduce the model. Finally, in chapter 19, Hélène Hernandez gives a radical critique of patriarchy among anarchists in the 20th century, and specifically the intellectual contributions made by anarchist feminists within the contemporary French labor movement.

We conclude this book with some brief remarks in chapter 20, followed by an Appendix, containing a short interpretation by artist Pascal Robert of the paintings by feminist artist “Isabel”, in which Robert attempts to explain the dimension “beyond words” in which the graphic artist works and what is at stake when one ventures into this zone of silence.

Overall, this study of patriarchy is faced with the familiar methodological problem of how best to interweave fact and theory, anecdote and analysis. As Lévi-Strauss wrote in “The Primitive Mind,” “biographical and anecdotal history … is low-powered history, which is not intelligible in itself, and only becomes so when it is transferred en bloc to a form of history of a higher power than itself … The historian’s relative choice … is always confined to the choice between history which teaches more and explains less and history which explains more and teaches less.”

book oscillates between *analysis*, which tries to explain what man is, and *anecdote*, which tries to teach what he is capable of becoming. What better approach to understanding patriarchy, beyond learning the formal dictionary definitions of this term, than by examining the richly diverse descriptions of gender relationships found in the following chapters? It is the hope of these authors that the recognition of national differences and gender differences will provide new vantage points from which we may gain wider perspectives on our own prejudices and thereby find fulfillment of our aspirations to become more fully human.
PART I:

ON THE RE-PRODUCTION OF TRADITIONS
AND THE SHAPING OF MALE/FEMALE
CONSCIOUSNESS
CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW REPUBLICAN MAN: AN INQUIRY
INTO THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN PATRIARCHY

FRANCIS FEELEY

Two centuries ago, a former European Colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster in which the taints, the sickness, and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions.
—Frantz Fanon

Thesis: The origins of the New Republican Man in the United States of North America can be traced back to the Great Puritan Revolution (1642-1688), which gave rise to the modern state (the natural enemy of kinship and clientage) and to the rise of the nuclear family—that microcosm of dependent power hierarchies—reproducing human relationships of male supremacy and possessive individualism which remain the hallmarks of modern capitalism. In this essay we will look at four 18th-century republicans—John and Abigail Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Mary Wollstonecraft—in an attempt to determine how gender relationships were altered in this age of early bourgeois democracy.

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee proposed a resolution to the Second Continental Congress, stating that “these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States.” Four days later Congress appointed a committee of five delegates to draft a declaration. The committee consisted of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, and Robert R. Livingston. On 28 June the committee submitted their draft of the Declaration to Congress, and after three days of congressional debate the final draft of the Declaration was unanimously approved the delegates of the Second Continental Congress on 4 July 1776. It began with the famous declaration:
WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that *all Men* (sic) are created equal . . . 

The “WE” in capital letters was the committee of five men and the 56 signatories whose names appeared on the final drafts of the Declaration. The “Truths” (with a capital “T”) were the demonstrable facts which could be recognized by any rational person, and “all Men” (with an capital “M”) was underscored in the original manuscript to emphasize gender superiority.1

The American Revolution and the early Republic of the United States of America granted women almost no status whatever. The word “republic,” along with “public” and “virtue”—virtue being perceived as appropriate to the public, political sphere—all derive from the terms in Latin relating specifically to men and to manliness. In referring to the public, political thinkers were speaking of a sphere of men; a republic, they assumed, is a political entity occupied with masculine doings; the Virtues are the manly attributes that citizens bring to public life. Americans could perceive women as mothers of republican citizens, but mothers were not granted primary authority over the upbringing of these future members of the public.

The Revolution was practically an all-male phenomenon. The principles of republican theory were familiar even to the common man in the New Nation, and Americans fashioned their state constitutions upon those principles. Republicanism totally and expressly excluded women.

The word “republic” derives from the Latin *res publica*, meaning the public thing or that which is of concern to the public. “Public,” in turn comes from the same Latin root as *public*, meaning maturity or manhood. Women were necessarily excluded, as were children, slaves, and the propertyless; for all these people were dependent, which was regarded as incompatible with the full status of manhood. (Unlike the word “Public”, “people” and “popular” were terms that included everybody.)

It was universally agreed that the activating principle of a republic was and must be virtue. This did not mean benevolence, kindness, or any of the other attributes associated with the idea of Christian charity. Rather, “virtue” stemmed from the Latin *virtus*, meaning manliness: it connoted courage, strength, virility, self-sufficiency. To say that the public virtue must activate the republic, then, is almost to be redundant: it means that manly men must attend to those matters that are of concern to men. The

opposite of virtue, in the 18th-century usage, was “effeminacy,” which was used interchangeably with “vice” and “luxury.”

In this essay we will look first at John Adams’ view of “Republican Virtue”, and then we will consider the proliferation of the nuclear family in early Anglo-Saxon society as constituting the formation of a new social order. In the third part of this essay, we will evaluate one of America’s “Founding Fathers,” Benjamin Franklin and the influence he had on American political culture. And finally, in the fourth part, we will take into account the insights expressed by Mary Wollstonecraft on the emerging despotism of men over women at the time of republican political formations in North America and Western Europe.


John Adams (1735-1826) had a great deal to say on the subject of “Republican Virtue.” When the principles of a republic were pure, he wrote, it was “productive of everything, which is great and excellent among Men.” But “there must be a positive Passion for the public good, the public interest, Honor, Power, and Glory.” This public passion “must be Superior to all private Passions. Men must be ready, they must pride themselves, and be happy to sacrifice their private Pleasures, Passions, and Interests, nay, their private Friendships and dearest Connections, when they stand in Competition with the Rights of Society.” As for women, “their delicacy renders them unfit for practice and experience in the great business of life, and the hardy enterprise of war, as well as the arduous cares of state.”

The agrarian republicanism, formulated in 17th-century England at the time of the Puritan Revolution, held that ownership and cultivation of the land breeds independence and manly virtue, and contended that if most of the people own and cultivate their own land the supply of public virtue will always be adequate for the support of the Republic. The great mass of white adult males in the former British North American colonies were in fact owners and cultivators of the soil, but the consequence for women was to deprive them of part of the limited role they played in the political economy. They could be mothers of the sons of the republic, it is true, but

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2 A more detailed discussion of this view can be found in the debate between Professors Forest McDonald and Elisabeth Fox Genovese published in Virginia Bernhard, et al., Firsthand America (New York, 1985), pp. 192-193.

3 Ibid., p.192.
they became politically dependent on their husbands, as the new electoral system which selected law-makers excluded them.

At the time of the American Revolution Abigail Adams (1744-1818) admonished her husband, John Adams, that for purposes of political justice the New Republic would require laws which specifically protect the rights of women:

... 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 to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power in the hands of husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention are not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound to obey the laws in which we have no voice of representation.4

In this famous letter to her husband, Abigail Adams argued that unless men were explicitly restrained by laws, many would habitually abuse women. She was hoping that her husband would agree that the new republican lawmakers should institutionalize the protection of women. He did not.


In this letter reporting on her husband’s response to her defense of women, Ms Adams told Ms Warren that John Adams had ridiculed her when she presented a list of grievances to him on behalf of women. “I thought it was very probable,” she explained to her friend,

[that] our wise statesmen would erect a new government and form a new code of laws, I ventured to speak a word in behalf of our sex who are rather hardly dealt with by the laws of England which gives such unlimited power to the husband to use his wife ill. I requested that our legislators would consider our case and as all men of delicacy and sentiment are averse to exercising the power they posses, yet as there is a natural propensity in human nature to domination I thought the most generous plan was 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.5

John Adams reacted to this request, wrote Abigail Adams, by declaring that “he cannot but laugh at my extraordinary code of laws [and] that he had heard their struggle [for independence from England] had loomed the bonds of government, that children and apprentices were disobedient, that schools and colleges were grown turbulent, that Indians slighted their guardians, and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But my letter was the first intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown discontented. This is rather too course a compliment, he adds, but I am so sausy he wont (sic) blot it out.”

Abigail Adams concluded her letter in bitter irony, that it would be bad policy for republican men to grant formal protection to women, since they believe that “under all the disadvantage we labor, we have the ascendance over their hearts

‘And charm by accepting,
By submitting sway.’

“I will tell him,” she wrote her friend, “[that] I have only been making trial of the disinterestedness of his virtue [and] when weighed in the balance have found it wanting.”

Friendship between the Adams family and the Warren family was temporarily ruptured, when Mercy Otis Warren and her husband joined the Anti-Federalists in opposition to ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Finally, in 1791, after three-and-a-half years of national debates, the Constitution was ratified. John Adams had already been elected the first Vice-President of the United States in 1789; then in 1797 he became the second Federalist President, followed by Republican President Thomas Jefferson in 1801.

At the start of the war for independence John Adams complained that there was “too much Corruption, even in this infant Age of our Republic.” A year later, he went on to express the almost treasonous wish, observes the American Studies scholar Ronald Takaki (b.1939), that:

it should be the ‘Will of Heaven’ and the ‘Design of Providence’ that the British army would punish the Americans for their waywardness. If ‘our Army should be defeated, our Artillery lost, our best Generals kill’d, and Philadelphia fall in Mr. Howes [sic] Hands,’ the foundations of American independence would be laid deeper and stronger. Such military disasters ‘would cure Americans of their vicious and luxurious and effeminate

6 Ibid., p.34.
The war against England represented more than the urge for political and economic independence from the Empire; it was depicted as a moral cleansing in the Puritan tradition, where moral aestheticism and republicanism came together to promote the creation of self-governing men, capable of repressing their lower instincts and experiencing a moral regeneration and distance from sinful thoughts and corrupting influences.

At the age of 80, John Adams was still seen endorsing this notion of Republican Virtue. When asked what is meant by the word Revolution, he replied: “The war with Britain? That was no part of the revolution; it was only the effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people . . . before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington.”

2. The social origins of the New Republican Man

As heirs of the 17th-century Puritan Revolution, and the 18th-century Industrial Revolution, the New England Puritans like Adams were sensitive to ascendancy of the merchant-entrepreneurial classes. The traditional kinship system of political power which supported the British aristocracy was being displaced increasingly by a new system which empowered the emerging bourgeoisie. In place of the conservative dependent power hierarchy (represented by the popular concept of “The Great Chain of Being,” with God at the head and Satan at the foot of the great moral pyramid), a patriarchal structure gradually took hold of the political landscape. The political influence of nuclear bourgeois families replaced that of the inherited political power of extended aristocratic families, and at the head of these nuclear families a new political status was granted to the head of the family, who in turn was subject to the political forces of dependent power hierarchies above and beyond his control and which were governed by the new free market economy.

To illustrate this radical shift in mentality, Princeton historian Lawrence Stone (1919-1999) in his book, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 – 1800, provided eye-witness accounts of the execution of King Charles I. The Puritan Revolution had raged for nearly seven years, the King of England had been tried and judged guilty of treason.

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against the nation and now, on January 30, 1649, there was to be a public execution. Years later witnesses recounted the event:

an old woman could still recall with horror the ‘dismal groan’ that she heard from the crowd as a child, while a boy remembered as long as he lived ‘such a groan as I never heard before, and desire I may never hear again’.

This mass response to the king’s execution, Stone suggests, “must surely have been a reflection of a feeling by the crowd that it had witnessed an act of national patricide: the father of his people had been publicly murdered.”

The triumph of the Puritan Revolution displaced the center of traditional authority enjoyed by the British aristocracy by introducing a new liberal ideology embraced by the growing British bourgeoisie. One institutional manifestation of this “New Order” was the creation of the “New Model Army” by Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), as an instrument of unprecedented repression that owed its efficiency to the fact that soldiers at all levels were systematically indoctrinated with religious training which introduced a new level of military discipline, internalized and more efficient than ever before.

Where the collective concept of that one grand pyramid, “The Great Chain of Being,” which had dominated for centuries the English political landscape (extending, on earth, from Monarchy down to the lowest beings in existence), there quickly mushroomed a multitude of small pyramids. These new dependent power hierarchies were represented by “nuclear families” ruled by their patriarchs. The “opposite sex” was effectively disarmed, and the new system of patriarchy was quickly reinforced by expediency. It was the age of commercial capitalism, and the new political leaders were entrepreneurs, land speculators, and merchants.

From the beginning of colonization British-Americans were taught to admire material success, and the “frontier” provided the economic basis for this lesson. The growing sense of nationalism, the democratic leveling

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