

Abigail Adams: “Remember the Ladies” (1776)

Abigail Adams, the wife of John Adams, wrote many letters to family and friends describing life around her. In March 1776, Abigail wrote from Massachusetts to her husband, who was attending the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. As can be seen in the following letter, she strongly advocated women’s rights.

I long to hear that you have declared an independancy—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 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 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 immitation of the Supreem Being make use of that power only for our happiness.

Review Questions

1. What does Abigail Adams request?
2. Why does she make this request? What arguments does she use to make her case?
3. What consequence does she predict if her request isn’t heeded?