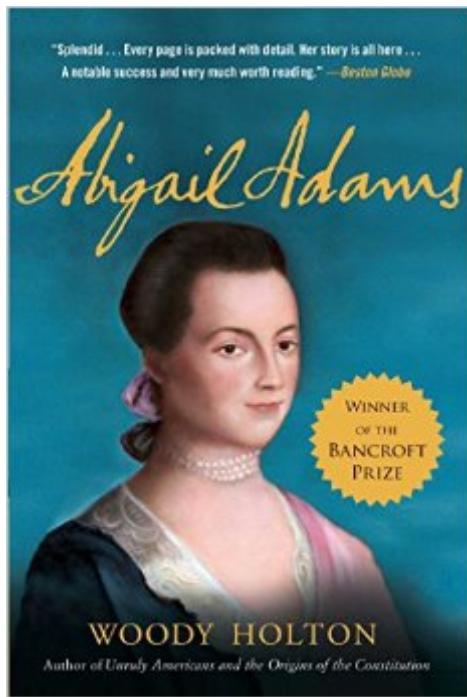


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# Abigail Adams: A Life



## Synopsis

In this new, vivid, nuanced portrait, now in paperback, prize-winning historian Woody Holton uses original sources and letters for the first time in a sweeping reinterpretation of Adams's life story and of women's roles in the creation of the republic. In this vivid new biography of Abigail Adams, the most illustrious woman of the founding era, Bancroft Award-winning historian Woody Holton offers a sweeping reinterpretation of Adams's life story and of women's roles in the creation of the republic. Using previously overlooked documents from numerous archives, Abigail Adams shows that the wife of the second president of the United States was far more charismatic and influential than historians have realized. One of the finest writers of her age, Adams passionately campaigned for women's education, denounced sex discrimination, and matched wits not only with her brilliant husband, John, but with Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. When male Patriots ignored her famous appeal to "Remember the Ladies," she accomplished her own personal declaration of independence: Defying centuries of legislation that assigned married women's property to their husbands, she amassed a fortune in her own name. Adams's life story encapsulates the history of the founding era, for she defined herself in relation to the people she loved or hated (she was never neutral), a cast of characters that included her mother and sisters; Benjamin Franklin and James Lovell, her husband's bawdy congressional colleagues; Phoebe Abdee, her father's former slave; her financially naive husband; and her son John Quincy. At once epic and intimate, *Abigail Adams*, sheds light on a complicated, fascinating woman, one of the most beloved figures of American history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Abigail Adams is perhaps best remembered for requesting that her husband, the not-yet-president John Adams, "remember the ladies" as he helped forge a new government in 1776. This famous private letter has turned Adams into a feminist icon, and while here she may have been specifically referring to domestic violence, in other letters she expressed what is often seen as a progressive, enlightened view that women should be equally educated with men and allowed to engage in business and control their own finances. This aspect of Adams's biography is well-known. But less so are her conflicted ideas on religion, African-Americans, money making, Europe, politics and family. In *ABIGAIL ADAMS*, by American history scholar Woody Holton, readers are given a vivid and complete picture of America's second first lady. Abigail Smith was born in Weymouth, Massachusetts in 1744, the daughter of a parson. She was raised by her overprotective parents but spent a lot of time with her more affectionate maternal grandmother. Along with her brother and two sisters, she had a typical childhood. She was atypical, though, in the sense that she yearned for an education forbidden to her, one of science and critical thinking in addition to literature and language. She managed to find ways to more fully educate herself through the study of languages and by reading whatever she could get her hands on. Just before her 20th birthday, she married John Adams, a lawyer family friend nine years her senior. Though one would expect her concern with education and worldly topics to end at that point, she remained true to her belief that girls should be educated as boys are and that women possess intelligence, reason and dignity. However, as Holton shows, Adams was not a feminist by today's standards.

Abigail Adams was all over the place in the Revolutionary era, her life entwining not only with that of her husband John, her son John Quincy Adams, and her daughter-in-law Louisa Catherine Adams, but also with those of Benjamin Franklin, George and Martha Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, Mercy Otis Warren, George III and Queen Charlotte, and other famous men and women, some she admired and some she deprecated. In this brisk and engaging new biography, Woody Holton highlights Adams's keen observation of the public events and public figures of her day, but even more importantly, he shines a steady light on the recesses of her private life, her relationships with her sisters and brother, husband, children, and grandchildren, her economic ventures, her daily activities, and her private dreams and values. Much of Holton's analysis focuses on two intertwined themes: Abigail Adams as economic agent and Abigail Adams as commentator and critic of women's roles in society. Holton convincingly argues that Adams was responsible for managing and shepherding much of the Adams family's wealth and that her investments turned a better profit than

her husband's investments did. The final chapter features an intriguing account of Adams's will, which she used to endow granddaughters, nieces, and other female relations (some already married) with modest economic portfolios of their own. Throughout her life, Adams testified to her concern for women's education-- she believed that the revolution in girls' schooling was one of the most important social changes of her lifetime-- and her wish that women might have more of a voice in society.

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