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Source: *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 159-193

Published by: [University of Pennsylvania Press](#) on behalf of the [Society for Historians of the Early American Republic](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3124150>

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‘‘THE PETTICOAT ELECTORS’’: WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE IN NEW JERSEY, 1776-1807

Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis

There is an old German proverb: *Einmal ist keinmal*, which means that ‘‘what happens only once, might as well not have happened at all.’’ As all historical events are essentially unique, they come to resemble the individual pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It is the role of the historian to assemble the pieces and reveal the picture. Consequently, occurrences that do not fit into an established pattern are either exiled to the periphery of historic discourse or reshaped in a manner which explains away their unruliness. The amazing story of New Jersey suffrage laws and practices between 1776-1807 has been subjected both to marginalization and distortion.

The facts are rather straightforward. In 1776, New Jersey adopted a constitution that ignored gender barriers in its suffrage clause. Other state constitutions drafted that year defined voters as ‘‘freeman’’ (Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, North Carolina), ‘‘man’’ (Vermont), ‘‘white male inhabitants’’ (Georgia), or ‘‘free white man’’ (South Carolina). New Jersey defined voters as adult inhabitants ‘‘worth fifty pounds’’ who resided in the state for one

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JOURNAL OF THE EARLY REPUBLIC, 12 (Summer 1992). © 1992 Society for Historians of the Early American Republic.

year. As married women's property ownership was invariably limited, however, only single women could vote.¹ From 1776 to 1807, women routinely participated in the state's electoral process. In 1807, the state legislature "reinterpreted" the constitution's suffrage clause and passed an election law that redefined voters solely as adult white male taxpaying citizens.

Political historians have been perplexed by the deviation of the small state of New Jersey from the established norm of exclusive male suffrage, as no historical trace of public agitation could be found either for or against the voting rights of single women prior to their enfranchisement in 1776 or disfranchisement in 1807.² Consequently, they have treated female suffrage as the result of a careless constitutional construction, downplaying the extent to which women actually voted and viewed the 1807 change in voter eligibility as the fruition of a legislative effort to reform the electoral system through the "clarification" of a "vague" suffrage clause.³

¹ Not all states rewrote their constitutions in 1776. New York, which did so in 1777, defined a voter as a "male inhabitant" and Massachusetts in 1780 called him a "male person." See Francis Newton Thorpe, ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories and Colonies now or hereafter Forming the United States of America* (6 vols., Washington, D. C. 1909), V, 2630, VI, 1912. The term inhabitant was declared in 1766 to mean: "Freeholder, Tenant for years, or Householder and Resident in Township or Precinct." Samuel Allison, *Acts of the General Assembly of the Province of New-Jersey: From the Surrender of the Government of Queen Anne, on the 17th Day of April . . . 1702 to the 14th Day of January 1766* (Trenton 1766), 287-288. For a thorough discussion of the laws of coverture and their political implications see Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill 1980), 139-155.

² Petitions were the accepted method of public agitation and, while such petitions preceded the 1776 extension of suffrage and the institution of township voting in 1790, they did not precede the 1807 voting act. In any case, they contained no specific reference to women. See Richard P. McCormick, *The History of Voting in New Jersey: A Study in the Development of Election Machinery, 1664-1911* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1953), 101; and J.R. Pole, "Suffrage Reform and the American Revolution in New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, 74 (July 1956), 173-193.

³ See Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860* (Princeton, N.J. 1960); Robert J. Dinkin, *Voting in Revolutionary America: A Study of Elections in the Original Thirteen Colonies, 1776-1789* (Westport 1982); Charles R. Erdman, *The New Jersey Constitution of 1776 . . .* (Princeton 1929); McCormick, *History of Voting in New Jersey*; Larry R. Gerlach, *Prologue to Independence: New Jersey in the Coming of the American Revolution* (New Brunswick 1976); Edward R. Turner, "Women's Suffrage in New Jersey: 1790-1807," *Smith College Studies in History*, I (July 1916), no. 4, 165-187; and J.R. Pole, "The Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, 71 (July 1953), 39-61.

Historians of gender have accepted the political historians' account of the brief period of female voting in New Jersey as anomalous. Hence, those who have considered it, placed greater emphasis on the 1807 disfranchisement than on the 1776 enfranchisement. They have been especially disturbed by the behavior of the New Jersey women who participated to an unprecedented degree in the political life of the state, but who seemed to accept with equal equanimity both their enfranchisement and disfranchisement. These historians resented the dismissive attitude with which traditional historians treated the whole matter, but their own emphasis on female agency caused them also to downplay the story. Instead, they focused on the ideological transformation of traditional female roles into republican wives and mothers or concentrated on women's use of republican rhetoric to justify their increasing involvement in the informal political process through the establishment of benevolent organizations.⁴

This emphasis on ideology and rhetoric is in tune with developments in recent revolutionary historiography that, as Joyce Appleby so astutely observes, resulted in a major transformation of historical causation. "Where the decision-making individual once stood at the center of our analysis of politics, ideology has pushed to the fore the social forces that presumably have shaped the consciousness of the individuals we study." It is within this framework that advocates of a republican paradigm carefully explore the evolution of contemporary theories of representation. Still, those who focus on representation fail to pay much attention to issues of

⁴ See Joan Hoff Wilson, "The Illusion of Change: Women and the American Revolution," in *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (DeKalb, Ill. 1976), 418; and Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston 1980), 354n. Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, and Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York 1989) do not even mention the episode. Also see Linda Grant De Pauw, *Fortunes of War: New Jersey Women in the American Revolution* (Camden, N.J. 1975). For a discussion of the republican view of marriage, see Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 44 (Oct. 1987), 689-721. On Republican motherhood, see Kerber, *Women of the Republic*. Also see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven 1990); Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review*, 89 (June 1984), 620-647; Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meaning of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs*, 13 (Autumn 1987), 37-58; and Anne M. Boylan, "Women and Politics in the Era Before Seneca Falls," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 10 (Fall 1990), 363-382.

gender or race. This oversight may be due in part to the paucity of sources, but it may also be due to the difficulty of explaining the wide divergence in state suffrage laws and practices by always assuming that people mean what they say or that they all say the same thing. After all, advocates of the “republican synthesis” also subscribe to a consensual interpretation of history. Instead, it is necessary to recapture the older historical art of penetrating behind the screen of rhetoric to the political reality as it is perceived by political decision makers not in order to undermine the significance of what people say, but in order to gain a better understanding of the reasons they say it, and the reasons some of their words gain wider acceptance than others.⁵

Thus, this essay is designed first and foremost to set straight the historical record by grounding the issue of female suffrage in the New Jersey politics of the time. After all: “To concur by one’s suffrage in enacting laws, is to enjoy a share, whatever it may be, of power;” politics is the arena where that type of power is exercised.⁶ Three successive political parties sought to gain control of the state government: the Patriots in 1776, the Federalists (first known as “Junto”) in 1789, and the Republicans in 1797. In each case, the fierce political battles that preceded their successful takeover of the state’s political machinery forced them to draw new population segments, including women, into the political process in the hope of securing their future loyalty. Women, along with others, lost the franchise when the state’s ruling elite concluded that their vote represented a political liability rather than a political asset.

This study will show that New Jersey’s 1776 Constitutional franchise clause, which permitted single adult women to participate in state elections, was thoroughly debated and purposefully written. The revolutionary-era political strife responsible for the countrywide

⁵ Joyce Appleby, “Republicanism and Ideology,” *American Quarterly*, 37 (Fall 1985), 462. See also Joan R. Gundersen, “Independence, Citizenship, and the American Revolution,” *Signs*, 13 (Autumn 1987), 59-60; and Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York 1992). For a discussion of the relevant historiography, see Linda K. Kerber, “The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation,” *American Quarterly*, 37 (Fall 1985), 474-495. The consensual interpretation of the history of the early republic has been challenged by historians who emphasize the liberal and protestant strands of the contemporary rhetoric. See Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republic Vision of the 1790s* (New York 1984); and Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York 1985).

⁶ John Lewis De Lolme, *Constitution of England* quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York 1969), 609n.

expansion of the electorate and for the politicization of new population segments, including women, was so strong in New Jersey that it led to the extension of the suffrage to single women. New Jersey, rather than representing an anomaly, simply stood at the cutting edge of the political continuum, and its laws represented the furthest reach of possibilities for female citizenship during the revolutionary period.⁷

When the war was over, New Jersey women escaped the post-revolutionary female depoliticization that Mary Beth Norton noted in the rest of the country. Instead, single women's behavior mirrored that of other newly enfranchised voting groups. It depended on local community standards, the ideological milieu and, most importantly, political party rivalry. Female political activity, which subsided immediately after the war, reemerged in 1789 with the birth of the Federalist party and reached its peak between 1797 and 1807 as the result of the intense struggle between Federalists and Republicans. During this period, both political parties actively campaigned for women's votes and women, in their turn, contributed to the political debate, gave public expression to their views, and took part in party activities. At no point, however, did women's political participation lead to the emergence of special women's issues or to an alteration in their legal status.⁸

Early in the nineteenth century, state after state rewrote constitutions that denied suffrage to their black, alien and at times poor residents.⁹ The fate of women's rights was inextricably linked to the rights of these politically weak segments of the population. In

⁷ Historians have shown that the revolution raised questions about women's rights and even led to the extension of some of those rights. See Kerber, *Women of the Republic*; Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*; and Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill 1986). For similar developments in revolutionary France, see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca 1988).

⁸ See Carmela Ascolese Karnoutsos, "Historical Overview: 1600-1807," in *Past and Promise, Lives of New Jersey Women* (Metuchen, N.J. 1990), 2-5; and DePauw, *Fortunes of War*, 34.

⁹ Charles H. Wesley, "Negro Suffrage in the Period of Constitution-Making, 1787-1865," *Journal of Negro History*, 32 (Apr. 1947), 143-168; Irwin N. Gertzog, "Female Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807," *Women & Politics*, 11 (Apr. 1990), 47-58. It should be noted that Republicans were greatly divided over the appropriate criteria for voter eligibility and at least one Republican outlet reported that it was "ardently to be desired that but one opinion may ere long prevail on this point among Republicans in the United States." *Republican Watch-Tower* (New York), Apr. 21, 1804.

1807, the continued Republican dominance of the state became dependent on the passage of an election law which disfranchised women along with blacks, aliens and the penniless. So, Republicans did what needed to be done to hold on to power.

Indubitably, the paucity of sources presents a formidable barrier to a completely satisfactory accounting of either the causes of women's enfranchisement or the extent to which they exercised their right to vote. Only a few poll lists survive and minutes are lacking for deliberations in the Legislative Council, the Assembly, and the legislative drafting committees. Historical evidence is thus limited to personal papers, travelers' reports, and most importantly, local party newspaper accounts. Still, profitable use can be made of these sources provided one pays careful attention to their biases.

Particularly important is the unabashedly partisan character of the papers as it permits the extrapolation of the party position on a controversial issue from a rather innocent looking letter to the editor. Party papers in New Jersey invariably toed the party line even in their fictional sections. Moreover, this very partisanship helps illuminate the political nature of ideological gender constructs as each period of heightened political activity was accompanied by a reexamination of women's role in public life in the papers of the party that sought to encourage female political participation. Thus, the timing of the printing as well as the political affiliation of the newspapers are as vital to a fruitful interpretation of materials chosen for publication as is their content. Cultural debates do not take place in a political vacuum, nor are they won or lost on their philosophical merit alone.

The first indication of female participation in New Jersey's political life dates back to 1702 when a woman proprietor was among the signers of the document ceding the colony to Queen Anne. However, the new election law written under the authority of the queen included a reference to "the Division for which *he* shall vote." This gender reference was sufficient to exclude women from the polls for the next 74 years.¹⁰ During that period a disparity developed between the written law and its local application. While only freeholders voted for the state assembly, householders voted in

¹⁰ Julian P. Boyd, ed., *Fundamental Laws and Constitutions of New Jersey, 1664-1964* (Princeton 1964), 131 (authors' emphasis); Mary Philbrook, "Women's Suffrage in New Jersey Prior to 1807," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, 57 (July 1939), 88.

township elections and candidates actively carried the favor of the "lower class" at least as early as 1772.¹¹ Two years later, colonial unrest led to the election of the Provincial Congress and township committees. These new institutions began to function as an alternative source of authority to the colonial government. While it seems probable that some "inhabitants" helped elect the Provincial Congress in 1774, there is no doubt that the call for the election of the second provincial convention went out only to those "qualified to vote," meaning freeholders. This limitation did not sit well with many of the inhabitants, especially when the Congress began to raise money through taxation.

By 1775, the local revolutionary elite was confronted with the potential rebelliousness of the "lower orders." The slogan "no taxation without representation," which the revolutionaries used to undermine the legitimacy of the British administration, was turned against the revolutionaries themselves. Petitions flooded the Congress demanding the vote for householders or taxpayers. A fierce debate over suffrage extension ensued but when the question was put "whether every person of full age, who . . . resided one whole year in any County . . . and is worth at least fifty pounds . . . shall be permitted to vote . . . in the County wherein *he* resides?" opponents won postponement in order to evaluate better "the sense of the Colony in general" by a vote of seven to six.¹²

When the Provincial Congress reconvened in January 1776, the continuous flood of petitions led its members to conclude that the "Colony in general" insisted on suffrage extension. After considerable debate, the Congress rejected demands for taxpayer suffrage but liberalized the property qualifications. It passed an ordinance stipulating that any person who had "signed the general association recommended by this congress" and who had "fifty pound proclamation money in personal estate" would be eligible to vote. The first requirement insured the exclusion of Tories from the polls, while the second change insured that the voters no longer had to be possessed of real property, meaning land.¹³

In the meantime, the Continental Congress asked the colonies to formalize their revolutionary governments by adopting new

¹¹ Pole, "Suffrage Reform," 175.

¹² See the letter signed "Essex" in the *New-York Journal*, Sept. 28, 1775; *Minutes of the Provincial Council and Council of Safety* (Trenton 1879), 231.

¹³ McCormick, *History of Voting in New Jersey*, 67-68.

constitutions. As the second Provincial Congress did not consider itself authorized to undertake such an assignment, it included in its suffrage ordinance a call for yearly elections for the “duration of the troubles,” the first to be held in May 1776. Also, “several gentlemen, who were supposed best qualified, were requested, in the vacation, to prepare and forward to the convention, forms or outlines of a constitution.”¹⁴

The third Provincial Congress, one elected by the newly enfranchised residents of the state, convened and was presented with a number of pre-prepared constitutional drafts. It appointed a committee of ten to evaluate and amend one of the submissions. Two days later, the committee presented the convention with the first draft of the state constitution. It included the following suffrage clause:

That all freeholders, and householders, inhabitants of this colony, who are worth fifty pounds clear estate in the same, shall be admitted to vote representation in Assembly and also for all other public officers that shall be elected by the people.¹⁵

By the time the final charter was adopted, the suffrage clause had undergone some important changes: the attempt to define voters solely as freeholders or householders was rejected, a residential requirement was added and so was the definition of the value of the estate in terms of proclamation money. As it is clear that the suffrage clause underwent close scrutiny that led to significant changes, the fact that no gender references were inserted was unlikely to have been accidental.¹⁶

Instead, the examination of the long road that led to the controversial wording of the 1776 suffrage clause should lay to rest once and for all the contention that the liberality of the clause was the

¹⁴ *Genius of Liberty* (Morristown, N.J.), Feb. 13, 1800.

¹⁵ This first draft of the New Jersey State Constitution was discovered among the revolutionary era manuscripts of the New Jersey Historical Society.

¹⁶ It seems that earlier suffrage qualifications included the possession of fifty pounds sterling, not proclamation money. For a discussion of the issue, see McCormick, *History of Voting in New Jersey*, 43, 60-61. Similarly, as Linda Kerber noted, when the Continental Congress sought to include women among persons who could commit treason, it was careful to avoid the use of the “generic he” in its treason statute. It declared that “all persons abiding within any of the United Colonies, and deriving protection from the laws of the same, owe allegiance to the said laws, and are members of such colony.” Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 121.

result of simple carelessness due to haste.¹⁷ Rather the time and the care invested by members of the New Jersey's Provincial Congress indicate that they were cognizant of the Loyalists' admonitions that Patriot advocacy of actual representation justified extending the vote to "every man, woman, boy, girl, child, [and] infant . . ." in the country. They, like John Adams, knew that it was "dangerous to open so fruitful a Source of Controversy and altercation; as would be opened by attempting to alter the Qualifications of voters. There will be no End of it. New claims will arise. Women will demand the vote."¹⁸ So, while they were unable to prevent suffrage extension, they were careful to limit it by adhering to property qualifications and resisting attempts to institute taxpayer suffrage.

In fact, it seems likely that New Jersey's legislators, like their counterparts in other states and nations, believed not only that those who possessed the necessary property were entitled to representation, but also that the property qualification would prevent an overdemocratization of the voting process. Therefore, not only was there no need for a large number of additional qualifications, but it made possible the inclusion of voters from groups that otherwise might be deemed unsuitable. Indeed, most early state constitutions failed to exclude blacks from voting, not because of oversight, but because so few could qualify.¹⁹ This gives credence to the assertion of an opponent of women's suffrage who claimed that in granting suffrage to propertied single women, the state legislators "acted from a principle of justice, deeming it right that every free person who pays tax should have a vote." While there is ample evidence that women

¹⁷ Between 1798 and 1800, New Jersey was embroiled in a debate over the desirability of a major revision of its constitution. Those who advocated such a revision justified their position by arguing that the speed with which it was written was responsible for its flaws. Foremost amongst them was the Federalist William Griffith, who wrote a widely published critique of the 1776 constitution under the pseudonym "Eumenes." Opponents of the revision vehemently disagreed (see *Genius of Liberty*, Feb. 13, 1800), but access to their writings was more difficult and historians based their conclusions on Griffith's argument.

¹⁸ Quoted in Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass. 1967), 170; John Adams to James Sullivan, May 26, 1776, in *Letters of the Delegates to Congress, 1794-1789*, ed Paul H. Smith (18 vols., Washington, D.C. 1976-1991), IV, 75.

¹⁹ See Kirk Harold Porter, *A History of Suffrage in the United States* (1918; rep., New York 1971). In a similar vein, the liberal French aristocrat, Marquis de Condorcet, also supported property qualifications and advocated extending France's right of suffrage to women and blacks who met them. See Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 112-114.

paid taxes to the revolutionary state government, New Jersey had no taxpayer suffrage. New Jersey did have a property qualification and given the restrictive nature of that qualification, the state legislators were prepared to revive “the time-honored right of femmes soles to represent their own property” especially since it appeared politically profitable to do so.²⁰

Historical tradition has always attributed women’s suffrage in New Jersey to Quaker influence. Reportedly, the “most approved” constitutional draft considered by the Provincial Congress was that of a member from Gloucester County, the Quaker John Cooper. Perhaps John Cooper’s belief in the equality of the sexes was partially responsible for the permissive nature of the suffrage clause, as was the need to secure the sympathetic neutrality of the large Quaker community in one of the country’s central battle zones.²¹

Still, Quaker neutrality was not the biggest problem faced by state patriots. In New Jersey, as in other mid-Atlantic states, the population was bitterly divided between loyalists and revolutionaries and there was a fierce competition for the allegiance of individuals. As Joan Gunderson demonstrated, “vigilantes and state governments clearly treated independent single women, either widowed or spinster, as though they had made a choice of allegiance.” New Jersey women could be found all over the political spectrum and some of them did not hesitate to take positions markedly in variance with that of other members of their family. So, one way to secure their allegiance was to include them along with other formerly excluded segments of the population in the body politic. Perhaps, the revolutionary leadership even shared Tom Paine’s hope “that heaven might inspire some Jersey maid to spirit up her countrymen.”²²

²⁰ *True American* (Trenton), Oct. 18, 1802; Sophie H. Drinker, “Votes for Women in 18th-Century New Jersey,” *New Jersey History*, 80 (Jan. 1962), 45.

²¹ *Genius of Liberty*, Feb. 13, 1800. In 1858 William A. Whitehead wrote the first historical account of the origin of female suffrage in New Jersey. He credited the 1790 election law, which included the phrase “he or she,” to the Quaker influence of the assemblyman Joseph Cooper and other historians followed suit. See “A Brief Statement of the Facts Connected with the Origin, Practice and Prohibition of Female Suffrage in New Jersey,” *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, 8 (1858), 102. As McCormick demonstrated in *History of Voting in New Jersey*, 93, however, Cooper was not a member of the drafting committee of the 1790 election law. It is possible that the tradition crediting Cooper of Gloucester County with influencing the suffrage clause in favor of women was mistakenly attributed to Joseph Cooper in 1790 instead of John Cooper in 1776.

²² Gunderson, “Independence, Citizenship, and the American Revolution,”

The politicization of women began with the pre-revolutionary boycott of English goods. Women formed anti-tea leagues, popularized brews made of raspberry, sage and birch and called it "Liberty Tea," increased their production of homespun cloth, and pledged to buy only domestic goods. The revolutionary conflict altered the women's perception of their traditional tasks and led them to regard themselves as political beings.²³

Due to their location in the heart of battle, New Jersey women's ability to stay out of the revolutionary fray was rather limited. Women's willingness to take up arms in support of the patriotic cause has been widely recorded in the annals of the state. That is not surprising considering that some New Jersey women concluded that the British "waged war" against their "sex." Numerous New Jersey women were forced to flee their homes or see them and themselves plundered. Following the battle of Springfield, the *New-Jersey Gazette* reported that "six widows are burnt out; some very aged, and others with small families; and almost all the houses in the neighborhood which were not burnt, were torn to pieces, entirely plundered." Hanna Caldwell of the renown Newark Ogdens, a mother of nine who chose to stay in her home, was shot.²⁴

Three weeks after the battle, women organized a committee to aid sick and wounded soldiers. Congressman Abraham Clark supported their initiative by asking the New Jersey treasurer to provide the committee with the necessary finances. Other women followed the lead of the female patriots of Philadelphia and organized a fund-raising campaign for Washington's troops which netted the considerable sum of \$15,488.²⁵

68; Paine, "The Crisis," Dec. 23, 1776, in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Phillip S. Foner (New York 1945), 51. See, Karnoutsos, "A Historical Overview," 4. Note that other mid-Atlantic states such as New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland also relaxed their suffrage qualifications. See Porter, *History of Suffrage in the United States*, 13.

²³ See Norton, *Daughters of Liberty*; Kerber, *Women of the Republic*; and Evans, *Born for Liberty*.

²⁴ *New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), July 12, 1780; on the preponderance of rape in the state see Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 203. See also *New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth Town), June 14, 1800; *Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia) Apr. 2, 1777; and Frank R. Stockton, *Stories of New Jersey*, (New Brunswick, N.J. 1961), 144.

²⁵ Ruth Bogin, *Abraham Clark and the Quest for Equality in the Revolutionary Era, 1774-1794* (New Brunswick 1982), 178n; Mary Daworthy to George Washington, July 17, 1780, in *Writings of Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (39 vols., Washington 1931-1944), XIX, 72n.

Questions relating to the rights and duties of women dogged the state government. Attempts by women to pass between the lines were a constant irritant. In August 1777, Governor William Livingston published a proclamation prohibiting the issue of passes “under any Colour or Pretense whatsoever” and ordering all civilian and military officers to do their utmost to apprehend every person lacking a pass “on *his or her* Way” to the enemy line. Such offender after “transmitting the Cause of *his or her* Caption” would be promptly punished. The Governor insisted that he had “neither Inclination nor Leisure” to inquire into the merit of each woman’s petition to cross the lines, and therefore resolved to refuse them all. He explained to Washington that women might strengthen the loyalist cause: “I have never heard or read of a great Politician who did not employ petticoats to accomplish his Designs.” The women might spread stories which would “discourage the weaker part of our Inhabitants” or even more importantly engage in illegal trade.²⁶

At least some of the Patriots could not and did not hold on to the view that women should stay out of the political arena. Livingston considered a woman who traded with the enemy “merely for her private advantage” contemptible and insisted that she be “committed for an offence that admits of no bail.” Count Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, the future husband of Livingston’s niece, insisted that “every young maiden is born a citizen and only becomes a wife later, her country first, husband second.”²⁷

Women followed in Lysistrata’s footsteps and entered “into a resolve for every mother to disown her son, and refuse the caresses of her husband, and for every maiden to reject the addresses of her gallant” if any of them failed to hold fast to the patriotic position. In a similar vein, Hannah Arnett in the presence of her husband and the local leaders of Elizabeth Town, declared:

For me, I stay with my country, and my hand shall never touch the hand, nor my heart cleave to the heart of him who shame her Isaac, we have lived together for twenty years But

²⁶ “Proclamation,” Aug. 14-17, 1777, in *The Papers of William Livingston*, ed. Carl F. Prince and Dennis P. Ryan (4 vols., Trenton 1979-1987), II, 30; Livingston to Mary Martin, Feb. 16, 1778, *ibid.*, 232; Livingston to George Washington, Nov. 9, 1776, *ibid.*, 174-175. Authors’ emphasis.

²⁷ Livingston to Washington, Apr. 11, 1778, *ibid.*; Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels through America in 1797-1799, 1805 with Some Further Account of Life in New Jersey* (1797-1807; rep., Elizabeth 1965), 208.

I am the child of God and of my Country, and if you do this shameful thing [turn the town over to Cornwallis], I will never again own you for my husband."²⁸

The governor even tried to galvanize women to political action. He published a letter under the pseudonym "Belinda" in which "Belinda" urged her sisters to "draw their pens" and enter their "solemn protest" against all efforts to reach a compromise solution to the war.²⁹ His sentiments were shared by those revolutionaries who toasted "The Fair of America; may their virtues and patriotism, so much hidden by arbitrary fashion, be more publicly displayed, and they be rewarded by gratitude of every observer." Thus, the political needs of the Patriots led them to define women as virtuous individuals, capable of independent political judgment who should be encouraged to become full members of the body politic.³⁰

When the war was over, New Jersey inhabitants quickly turned away from public affairs in an effort to rebuild their lives and state. Women's interaction with the state consisted mainly of petitions for army widows' pensions or attempts to recover confiscated loyalist property. Politics received little attention, and only a small percentage of the eligible voters bothered to vote in the purely local elections, in part because of lack of interest and in part due to the inaccessibility of the polling places. There is evidence, however, that women voted during the first decade after independence.³¹

Things changed in 1789. The ratification of the national constitution did not cause much controversy in New Jersey, but an

²⁸ *New-Jersey Gazette*, May 6, 1778; Arnett quoted in *History of Women Suffrage*, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton (6 vols., New York 1881-1922), I, 444.

²⁹ *New-Jersey Gazette*, May 6, 1778 reprinted in *New Jersey in the American Revolution 1763-1783, A Documentary History*, ed. Larry R. Gerlach (Trenton 1975), 340-341. In a letter to George Washington dated Apr. 27, 1778, Livingston confessed that he sent the editor "a number of letters, as if by different hands, not excluding the tribe of the petticoats, all calculated to caution America against the insidious arts of her enemies." In Prince and Ryan, eds., *The Papers of William Livingston*, II, 313.

³⁰ *New-Jersey Gazette*, July 16, 1778. A woman who signed herself "Margaret Distressed" responded to their urgings by writing a letter to the *New-Jersey Journal* Jan. 18, 1780, in which she proudly asserted that she steadfastly put up with the financial hardships brought on by the war and "freely contributed towards the common cause." But it seemed amazing to her "that one part of the inhabitants shall have the liberty, without any restraint, to reduce our money down one penny per dollar."

³¹ The Burlington poll list for 1787 includes the name of two women, Iona Curtis and Selveria Lilvey. Henry C. Shinn, "An Early New Jersey Poll List," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 44 (Jan. 1920), 77-81.

attempt to control the elections of statewide congressional representatives surely did. That year, a group of west Jersey conservative businessmen, many of them Quakers, organized a slate of candidates in an endeavor to wrest control of the legislature from the east Jerseyites. The results were indecisive, but the election in 1798 marked the birth of the "Junto" or Federalist party, the rejuvenation of party strife, and the repoliticization of the population.

These developments led to the passage of an election law in 1790 that reflected the Federalist gentry's need to widen their political base. The law was designed to enhance Federalist power in the legislature and therefore applied only to the state's seven most Federalist counties. It instituted township voting that greatly increased the accessibility of the polls and referred to voters as "he or she."³² The clarification that elicited no public comment either before or after its inclusion in law was probably intended to enhance propertied female participation in the political process. After all, New Jersey women were "in the number of the best patriots America can boast."³³ Women with husbands could not vote, but those without husbands certainly could and did. Some were, after all, considered officially to be "heads of families."³⁴ Suddenly, in a manner reminiscent of the revolutionary period, Federalists began emphasizing the suitability and desirability of female political participation.

³² See Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York 1984), 155, 348; and Gertzog, "Female Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807." A November 1787 "Act to enable owners of tide swamps and marshes to improve the same" gave women the right to vote by proxy. In 1790, the state legislature included Joseph Ellis, William Woodhull, Frederick Frelinghuysen, James Lynn, and Ellis Cook, men who had been members of the Third Provincial Congress and thus were certainly familiar with the intent of the state constitution. The same applied to Governor William Paterson, who signed the election law of 1790. See *Harriet F. Carpenter, Realtor, v. Charles A. Cornish et al.*, Brief for the Plaintiff, Court of Errors and Appeals, New Jersey Supreme Court Records (New Jersey State Archives, Trenton).

³³ Washington to Boudinot, Aug. 31, 1788, in Ford, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, XXX, 76.

³⁴ The New Jersey census in 1790 included a category entitled "Free White Females, including Heads of Families." Black men and women were counted together as either slave or free. See Thomas F. Gordon, *Gazetteer of the State of New Jersey: Comprehending a General View of its Physical and Moral Contitions . . .* (1834; rep., Cottonport, La. 1973). The 1793 Election Records of Newton Township include the name of Hope Carpenter. Anderson Family Papers (New Jersey Historical Society, Newark).

There can be little doubt but that New Jerseyans were aware of the trans-Atlantic debate concerning women's place in society that accompanied the early years of the French Revolution. This debate pitted those who believed that all individuals, including women, had legal and political rights as citizens against those who had a gendered view of citizenship. The latter insisted that female citizens possessed special nurturing qualities that disqualified them as participants in the formal political arena, but which uniquely qualified them for participation in the informal political arena.³⁵

Not surprisingly, the Federalist Burlington *Advertiser*, published in the heart of the state's Quaker community, printed a flurry of articles on and by women and came down on the side of natural rights advocates. Other papers ignored the subject. "Thoughts on Women," written by "a celebrated Writer" advanced the argument that what women lacked in reasoning, they made up in instinct. The important thing to remember was that "she arrives at the top of the stair-case as well as he." If some women's judgment was inferior to men's, it was only because they had fewer opportunities to exercise it. Another article described approvingly "a young lady, like a young professor" surrounded by "maps, globes and books" diligently reading the paper.³⁶ Clearly, she was fit to vote. "The Humble Address of Ten Thousand Federal Maids" expressed women's growing disdain of the national political scene and their belief that given a chance they could do better. The maids expressed their willingness to earn their right to run the country by paying taxes and serving in the military. In return, they demanded "the right of election to all public offices." After all, the maids of New Jersey already had the right to elect public officers and lacked only the right to get elected.³⁷

The Federalist campaign to politicize women culminated in 1793 in a Fourth of July oration rendered by one of New Jersey's leading citizens and Alexander Hamilton's closest friend and ally, Elias Boudinot. Boudinot insisted that "the road to honors, riches, usefulness and fame, in this happy country, is open equally to all. The equality of citizens in its true sense must . . . secure a certainty

³⁵ For a discussion of the competing ideologies, see Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley and Anne Margolis, *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill 1988), 4-5.

³⁶ Burlington (N.J.) *Advertiser*, July 20, May 6, 1790.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Feb. 1, 8, 1791. William Griffith, a noted Federalist, estimated 10,000 to be the approximate number of eligible female voters.

of success to all who shall excel in the service of their country, without respect for persons.’’ Alluding to the role women played in the state’s public affairs, Boudinot asked his female audience, ‘‘Have you not at all times, and do you not still continue to participate deeply in the multiplied blessings of our common country?’’ Expressing the hope that women would take full advantage of the opportunities presented to them and increase their involvement in public affairs throughout the country, Boudinot asserted, ‘‘The rights of women are no longer strange sounds to an American ear, and I devoutly hope the day is not far distant when we shall find them dignifying in a distinguishing code, the jurisprudence of several states of the Union.’’

As if anticipating arguments about the fitness of women for the public arena, Boudinot reminded his audience of its special debt to the fair sex:

In vain did Columbus, our great founder and discoverer, after settling the principles of his sound philosophy apply to the wise men of his country . . . all his hopes, and those of a New World, had at last sunk in despair . . . had not the penetrating wisdom and persevering magnanimity of the fair, but undaunted Isabella . . . saved this Western world from oblivion of more than five thousand years After the refusal of her husband-despising the appendages of brilliant royalty, when compared with the general good of mankind, her enlarged mind, incapable of being confined by the shackles of the age, found a resource in her costly Jewels, which she freely offered as a pledge, to accomplish the glorious discovery of the Four Quarters of the Globe!³⁸

And it was probably during this period that Susan Bradford, née Boudinot wrote, ‘‘I congratulate the ladies of New Jersey that they are in some thing put on a footing with the gentlemen and the most extraordinary part it is, that it has been done by the gentlemen themselves but these are a few who have been more enlightened than the rest.’’³⁹

³⁸ Boudinot, ‘‘An Oration,’’ delivered at Elizabeth Town, New Jersey, July 4, 1793 (Special Collections Department, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, N.J.).

³⁹ Bradford to Mr. Samuel Bayard, Feb. 4, 1818, in *The Life, Public Services, Addresses, and Letters of Elias Boudinot*, ed. J[ane] J. Boudinot, (1896; rep., 2 vols., New York 1971), II, 171. (Either the date is a mistake or women continued to vote after 1807.)

Enlightened or not, these gentlemen proved rather changeable, and, by the end of the decade, they could no longer be counted among the supporters of the political rights of the ladies of New Jersey. In fact, the Federalist change of heart fits into the picture described by historians concerned with gender issues who view the turn of the century as a period in which the boundaries between the sexes were sharpened and women left or were pushed out of the formal political arena. Some historians note women's loss of interest, others focus on the development of gender-based definitions of such concepts as virtue and dependence, definitions that denied women the right to partake in the body politic in the same manner that men did. Even Ruth Bloch, an historian concerned with the gendered meaning of virtue, noted that these changes were in part a response to the political upheavals of the era.⁴⁰

Indeed, it is probable that New Jersey Federalists were influenced by the violent turn taken by the French Revolution, by the presence of French aristocratic émigrés who settled in Elizabeth Town and by their unease over what they considered to be the excessive egalitarian tendencies of New Jersey's political scene.⁴¹ Still, the change is more directly attributable to political factors such as the emergence of the Republican party, the parallel diminution of Federalists in New Jersey, and the development of fierce partisan rivalry in Essex county that altered the political playing field.

By 1797, Federalists were no longer able to block demands for the extension of township voting to Republican counties. A new election law provided for township polling throughout the state. Heightened interest resulting from party strife, greater accessibility of polls, and a general disregard for property qualifications combined to galvanize as well as practically enfranchise large new segments of the electorate. Efficient political machines were developed to organize this new electorate, and voters were no longer dealt with as individuals, but as members of interest groups for whose allegiance the parties competed.⁴²

⁴⁰ See, Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*; Gunderson, "Independence and Citizenship and the American Revolution;" and Bloch, "Meaning of Virtue," 55-58.

⁴¹ For a discussion of French émigrés in Elizabeth Town, see Theodore Thayer, *As We Were: The Story of Old Elizabethtown* (Elizabeth, N.J. 1964).

⁴² See Rudolph J. Pasler and Margaret C. Pasler, *The New Jersey Federalists* (Rutherford, N.J. 1975); and Carl E. Prince, *New Jersey's Jeffersonian Republicans: The Genesis of an Early Party Machine, 1789-1817* (Chapel Hill 1967).

The first attempt to recruit single women's vote in the manner of other interest groups, occurred in a hotly contested election in Essex County. Federalists realized that they were about to lose the election and embarked upon a last ditch effort to round up their supporters. It was not easy. Count Niemsewicz, a fairly impartial eyewitness, tells the following story:

Towards the middle of October I attended the state elections for the members of the Legislature of the State of New Jersey. Two or three days before that appointed by law, the principal inhabitants of the County . . . had their meeting in order to agree among themselves whom they wished to nominate They had received notice that a Mr. Pennington of a rival town to Eliz. Town and suspected of anti-federalism was running for office The first day one saw scarcely anyone but the citizens of the town, who all came with their ballots already filled out. The leaders stood at the door with bundles of these ballots and offered them to arrivals, who accepted them and placed them in the urn with unparalleled indifference. The next day, which was the day the election was to be concluded, the leaders seeing that the number of voters was very small and consequently New Ark was leading, became alarmed. They sent carriages into the country to bring out the farmers. They were obliged to beg them, even to treat them, so indifferent are the people to their privileges In spite of all their efforts to acquire the most votes possible, they received the news that the opposing party in Newark was prevailing. In this extremity they had recourse to the last expedient; it was to have women vote They scurried around collecting them. I need not say that the number was very small.⁴³

Newark and the Republicans won, but this incident focused attention on the state's unorthodox suffrage laws. The question emerged: were single propertied women like farmers, mechanics or Irishmen to become acknowledged components of the body politic? The response of both Federalists and Republicans was ambivalent at best. An article published by both Federalist and Republican papers reported that "at a late election in this Town women affected the privileges granted them by the laws of this State and gave their votes for members to represent them in the legislature." The correspondent

⁴³ Niemsewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree*, 22-23. According to Newark's *Centinel of Freedom*, Oct. 19, 1797, at least 75 women voted in Elizabeth Town.

noted that “it is a general opinion that females ought not to meddle in political affairs,” but went on to report that the Emperor of Java preferred women diplomats. Then, in a direct reference to Jay’s Treaty, he wondered whether better terms would not have been achieved “had some WIDOW been employed to negotiate it, instead of an *extraordinary MALE minister*.”⁴⁴ Similar ambivalence is apparent in yet another commentator’s remark that “the Rights of Man have been warmly insisted on by Tom Paine and other democrats, but we outstrip them in the science of government, and not only preach the ‘Rights of Women,’ but boldly push it into practice—Madame Wollstonecraft has certainly the merit of broaching this subject.”⁴⁵ Newark’s *Centinel of Freedom* ridiculed women’s voting but its ire was directed at the “the Federal Ladies of Elizabeth” for “gallantly advancing in a body to the polls” and casting their votes against Newark’s Republican candidates. The following year, the Federalist ladies of Elizabeth failed once more to block the election of Newark’s Republican candidate, John Condit:

Although reinforced by the *petticoat* band
True *Republican valor* they could not withstand
And of their disasters in triumph we’ll sing
For the *petticoat faction’s* a dangerous thing.⁴⁶

Two factors were primarily responsible for the party press’s ambivalent response to female suffrage. First, it took politicians some time to assess which party stood to benefit most from the female vote. Second, both parties had to be careful not to offend a significant group of voters. Despite the fact that only single women could vote, their number was rather substantial. The Federalist pamphleteer William Griffith estimated that “of widows and spinsters above twenty one, there can not, I imagine be fewer than 10,000.”⁴⁷

Federalists were the first to conclude erroneously that women’s suffrage was bound to benefit the Republicans. They failed to take into account the tendency of wealthier and better educated Federalist

⁴⁴ *State Gazette* (Trenton), *New Jersey Advertiser* (Newark), and *Centinel of Freedom*, all Oct. 18, 1797; *New-Jersey Journal*, Oct. 19, 1797.

⁴⁵ *Centinel of Freedom*, Oct. 18, 1797.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Oct. 18, 19, 1797, Oct. 23, 1798. Federalist female voting was also reported in Bergen County; *ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1798.

⁴⁷ [William Griffith] *Eumenes: Being a Collection of Papers written for the Purpose of Exhibiting Some of the More Prominent Errors and Omissions of the Constitution of New-Jersey* . . . (Trenton 1799), 31.

women for greater political participation. Instead, they worried that it was easier to draw out voters (including female) in the towns than in the country, and that the towns were becoming the bastions of the newly emerging Republican party.⁴⁸ Thus, operating on the basis of the dubious assumption that female suffrage was sure to benefit the opposition, Federalists changed their position and began to advocate female disfranchisement as part of a major electoral reform.

Suddenly, a dormant movement to revise the state constitution and to bring it more in tune with the federal constitution took on a special urgency. New Jersey, unlike her sister states, had not revised her revolutionary constitution. Federalist leadership, cognizant of its tenuous hold on the state, decided that the time had come to do so. It was a counter-revolutionary movement, widely supported by former loyalists, which soon lost Jeffersonian Republican support. Its proponents advocated limiting the power of the legislature and taxpayer suffrage. Griffith reported that the property qualification was unenforceable either because the “inspectors imagine it unjust or because popular opinion is against the regulation.”⁴⁹ Under such circumstances taxpayer suffrage, rather than extending the vote, would actually limit it. The poor, who tended to vote Republican, would be excluded.

It would also enable the Federalists to disfranchise women. Griffith, who argued that single women’s suffrage was bound to benefit Republicans, asserted that women did not have the qualities necessary for a virtuous citizen. “Women, generally are neither by nature, nor habit, nor education, nor by their necessary condition in society fitted to perform this duty with credit to themselves or advantage to the public.” The problem was, as Griffith openly admitted, that “such is the phraseology of the Constitution that it seems a violation of it not to admit their votes.” Therefore, Griffith included the need to “clarify” the voting rights of women among the reasons for his advocacy of a state constitutional revision. Not surprisingly, the legislation for the selection of electors for a new constitutional convention limited the suffrage to “free male persons.” That did not prevent women from casting their votes on the measure, which was soundly defeated. Clearly, the sentiments of the populace were at odds with those of the Federalist leadership.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Genius of Liberty*, Feb. 13, 1800; *New-Jersey Gazette*, Feb. 10, 1800.

⁵⁰ [Griffith] *Collection of Papers*, 30, 31. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Legislative*

Eighteen hundred was a presidential election year and both parties actively sought to galvanize their female supporters. Ideological scruples did not prevent Federalists from actively seeking their vote. Alexander Hamilton and Senator Matthias Ogden led the roster of Federalist campaigners. Reportedly, they had “so ingratiated themselves in the esteem of the Federal ladies of Elizabeth-town, and in the lower part of the state, as to induce them (as it is said) to resolve on turning out to support the Federal ticket in the ensuing elections.”⁵¹ Still, Federalist outlets were silent on the subject of women and politics.

Republicans, in their turn, tried to appeal to New Jersey’s female voters by an open advocacy of the equality of women. On August 7, 1800, the Republican outlet in Morristown published a Fourth of July oration delivered by a male “Citizen.” Here are some of the relevant excerpts:

Our daughters are the same relations to us as our sons; we owe them the same duties; they have the same science, and are equally competent to their attainments. The contrary idea originated in the same abuse of power, as monarchy and slavery, and owes its little remaining support to stale sophistry Had we no examples of women breaking down the barrier of the tyrant man, and storming the temple of fame—if we but reflected that the effects of their degradation recoiled upon ourselves, our own good sense would induce us to rescue them from TAMBOUR and FILIGREE, and the endless concerns of the TOILET, and raise them to nature and philosophy. But to confound our presumption, and forever to destroy our cobweb theories, the history of women is forever obtruding on our unwilling eyes bold and ardent spirits, who no tyrant could tame—no prejudice enslave. Besides the heroic daughters of antiquity, our own age has been blessed with the deep classic erudition of a Damien—the flowery meandering of a Rowe—the comic wit of Centlivere—the laborious patience and republican energy of a Macauley—the dramatic genius of Moore, of Lee, and of Inchbald—the melody and piety of Barbauld—the untaught towerings of Yeastly and Wheatly—the sprightly sallies of

Council . . . (Trenton 1799), 24th sess., 1st seating, Nov. 19, 1799. The Federalists did not advocate the disfranchisement of their loyal black voters. The Bedminster Township voting register of 1799 (New Jersey Historical Society) includes the names of Sarah Eoff(ss) and Margaret McDonald. The women voted against the revision.

⁵¹ *Centinel of Freedom*, Dec. 16, 1800.

Damer—the unconquerable heroism of Roland, and the invulnerable reason of Mary Wollstonecraft!

“Female—Citizens,” the author concluded, “follow examples so glorious; accept the station nature intended for you, and double the knowledge and happiness of mankind.”⁵²

In New York that year, a group of married women met on the Fourth of July “to celebrate in our own way the glorious and ever memorable day.” A woman by the name of Clara wrote to various papers requesting that the paper publish “their novel deed” in the hope that other women across the nation would follow their example. New Jersey’s Republican editors were happy to oblige. Their toasts included:

The female Republicans of France—May they ever have it in their power to reward the conquering heroes of their regenerated country.

A free and chaste press for to instruct and delight us.

Our fathers, husbands and brothers, who fought for the rights of man, and thereby secured those of the women.

The rights of women—may they never be curtailed.⁵³

Just prior to the election, the *Centinel of Freedom* reprinted a poem published in Massachusetts six years earlier that portrayed single women as strong, assertive and fiercely independent Republicans. In it “a lady, who was questioned respecting her inclination to marry,” proudly declared:

That I hate all the doctrines by wedlock prescribed;
Its law of obedience could never suit me,
My spirit’s too lofty, my thoughts are too free,
Like a haughty republic my heart with disdain,
Views the edicts of Hymen and laughs at his chain . . .
But round freedom’s fair standard I’ve rallied and paid,
A vow of allegiance to die an old maid.
Long live the Republic of freedom and ease,
May its subjects live happy and do as they please.⁵⁴

⁵² *Genius of Liberty*, Aug. 7, 1800.

⁵³ *Centinel of Freedom*, July 29, 1800; *Genius of Liberty*, July 31, 1800.

⁵⁴ *Centinel of Freedom*, Oct. 21, 1800. “Lines, Written by a lady, who was questioned respecting her inclination to marry,” also quoted in Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 242. On the effect of single life on female self-definition, see Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 147-151, 240-242. According to Norton, the woman in the poem accurately described the sentiments of Elizabeth Parker of Perth Amboy, New Jersey, who reportedly refused many marriage offers; *Liberty’s Daughters*, 241.

Republican politicians also sought to insure that the right of women to vote would not be impeded by unfriendly election officials. They proposed to amend the election law in such a way as to insure that the inspectors of the elections "shall not refuse the vote of any widow or unmarried woman of full age." The amendment was rejected on the ground that it would be superfluous since "the House unanimously agreed that this section would be clearly within the meaning of the constitution . . . [that] gives this right to maids or widows, black or white." A Republican legislator took care to publicize the legislative sentiments shortly before the elections.⁵⁵

Republican electoral gains were insufficient to put New Jersey's electors in Jefferson's column. Still, all across the state, Republicans celebrated the Virginian's victory as their own and raised their glasses in thanks to their female supporters. In Stony Hill, they toasted "The fair daughters of Columbia, those who voted in behalf of Jefferson and Burr in Particular." In Bloomfield they drank to "the Republican fair; May their patriotic conduct in the late elections add an irresistible zest to their charms; and raise the female character in the estimation of every friend to his country." And in Mendham they wished: "May their Republican conduct be pleasing and exemplary to their sisters of the Union."⁵⁶

Following the election, signs of the female politicization filled the Republican papers, which began to explore the domestic ramifications of women's changed status.⁵⁷ One poet pleaded the cause of newly enlightened women. He insisted that whether men liked it or not, it would be unfair to confine educated women to the domestic sphere:

Since they have learned to read, to write, to spell;
 Since some of them have wit, and use it well;
 Let us not force them back, with brow severe,
 Within the pale of ignorance and fear,
 Confined entirely by domestic arts;
 Producing only children and tarts.

⁵⁵ *Centinel of Freedom*, Nov. 7, 1800. It is important to note that Silas Condit of Morris, one of the founders of the Republican party, was a member of the committee of ten that formulated the state constitution. He should not be confused with John Condit, the Newark legislator who was opposed by Elizabeth Town female Federalists in 1798.

⁵⁶ *New-Jersey Journal*, Mar. 24, 10, 1801; *Centinel of Freedom*, Mar. 24, 1801.

⁵⁷ Concern over the potential effect of gender equality on the family appears universal. See Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 116.

Another poet retorted that taking seriously Miss Wollstonecraft's ideas about "the rights of both sexes" might lead American women to insist "on a small revolution in man." A young mother of twins might just tell her husband:

Henceforth, John, she cried, Our employments are common,
 Be women like man, and be man like to women!
 Here, take this child, John, and I'll keep his brother;
 While I WETNURSE the one, you shall DRY NURSE the other."⁵⁸

A "subscriber" complained about "women, who formerly devoted their time to their domestic concerns, now entirely neglect them, and become great politicians." He then described his visit to a farmhouse where the woman immediately asked him: "If you have a Philadelphia or any other newspaper with you, do pray let me have the perusal of it; I am so anxious; you cannot imagine how anxious I am to hear how affairs go." A verse writer paraphrased Shakespeare: "All the world's a newspaper, And all our men and women merely readers."⁵⁹

Furthermore, women were not satisfied with simply reading papers; they also used them to express their views on a wide variety of political issues. A woman by the name of Mrs. Rowson wrote a poem on "America, Commerce & Freedom" in which she celebrated the sailors who defied foreign attempts to curtail America's freedom of navigation. A widow who signed her letter "Citizen" complained of the failure of her town to supervise Negroes or prevent fires in an adequate fashion.⁶⁰ In fact, the significance of women's contribution to the political debate lies less in the content of their contribution, than in the fact that in New Jersey women's participation in the political discourse went uncurtailed for thirty years. Some men might have been unhappy with that state of affairs, others were clearly worried about the effect gender equality might have on home and hearth. Still, as long as women voted, they were acknowledged as rightful participants in the body politic, and as long as a party sought to benefit from their vote, its outlets printed materials dealing with gender issues.

Unfortunately, the Jeffersonian-Republican honeymoon with female suffrage was as short-lived as the Federalist had been. Again,

⁵⁸ *Centinel of Freedom*, Sept. 22, Dec. 29, 1801.

⁵⁹ *New-Jersey Journal*, Mar. 24, 1801; *Genius of Liberty*, Mar. 23, 1800.

⁶⁰ *Centinel of Freedom*, Jan. 11, 1797, May 1, 1798. It is possible that Mrs. Rowson is the celebrated author of *Charlotte Temple* and not a New Jersey woman. The paper, however, did not indicate that the poem was reprinted from another source, so one cannot be sure.

formal electoral politics were the culprit. Apparently, regardless of Federalist apprehensions, Republicans failed in their efforts to attract a large female following. A letter signed by a "Friend to the Ladies" published in the Republican outlet, *True American*, marked a turning point in Republican attitudes toward women. The writer professed to be amused by the sight of "whole wagon loads of those 'privileged fair,' who for the lucky circumstance of being possessed of 50 pounds, and of being disengaged at the age of 21, are entitled to vote." His allusion to the property qualification, along with his characterization of the voters as "privileged fair," clearly indicates that he was bothered by the fact that women voters supported the Federalist party. His assertion that "in some townships I am told they made up *almost a fourth* of the total votes" further explains the reason for Republican concern.⁶¹

Still, the writer stopped short of advocating that women should be "deprived of that right" because, he maintained, the right originated out of a "defect in our constitution." Basically, both Republicans and Federalists agreed that the state constitution granted single women the right to vote and only its amendment could deprive them of that right. As a wholesale revision of the constitution was sure to reduce significantly the power of the legislature within New Jersey's state government, Republicans strenuously objected to such a revision. Furthermore, as the overwhelming defeat of the referendum in 1800 demonstrated, the measure lacked public support.

Republicans were particularly incensed by the elections in 1802 that resulted in the election of an equal number of Federal and Republican representatives in the state's legislature. They blamed the outcome on a Federal victory in Hunterdon County that, it was remonstrated, came about as a result of an illegal Federal vote by a married woman or a female slave. Republican efforts to invalidate the results of the Hunterdon election failed, but William Pennington, the Republican representative from Newark and the brother of the editor of the *Centinel*, presented a bill entitled "An Act Relating to Female Suffrage" that was designed "to exclude all persons from voting excepting free white males."⁶² After some debate, the bill was

⁶¹ *True American*, Oct. 18, 1802 (authors' emphasis).

⁶² *Journal of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council*, 27th sess., 1st seating, Nov. 27, 1802. Republicans constantly referred to blacks as Federalists. The legislative committee which investigated the charges of fraud in Hunterdon found that the married woman in question had been separated from her husband for several years

withdrawn. The Republicans simply did not have the votes to pass this unconstitutional law at that time. After all, the Federalists had no reason to support the exclusion of their loyal black and female supporters from the polls, particularly as doing it in 1802 would have amounted to an open admission of guilt in the previous elections.

It is important to note that throughout this period, legislators did not receive a single petition advocating the disfranchisement of women, blacks, or aliens. There were complaints of illegal voting by married women or slaves, but no one questioned women's basic suitability to participate in the electoral process. Rev. John Pierpont's story further illustrates the equanimity with which New Jersey voters treated their suffrage:

Stopping for dinner at an inn . . . I saw at the bar where I went to pay, a list of the voters of the town stuck up. My eye ran over it, and I read to my astonishment the names of several women. "What! I said, "do women vote here?" "Certainly," was the answer, "when they have real estate."

Barred from politically acceptable means of disfranchising women, the Republican "friend of the ladies" asked them "to consider that female delicacy and reserve are incompatible with the duties of a free elector" and to refrain from exercising their voting rights. Thus, in 1802, Republicans raised their glasses to "the Fair daughters of Columbia—May chastity, prudence and industry be their true characteristic."⁶³ But in 1804, they once again drank to "The sons and daughters of Liberty."

This shift in the Republican attitude had little immediate effect beyond curtailing articles or verses dealing with issues related to the "rights of women" in the party press. As the "Friend to the Ladies" acknowledged, as long as women had the right to vote, "Each party will of course muster all its female champions, from apprehension that its antagonists will do the same."⁶⁴ Women remained politically active, and politicians continued to vie for their votes. The exact number of female voters remains a mystery, but evidence suggests that it kept pace with the statewide increase in voter participation

and paid taxes under her maiden name. *Votes and Proceedings of the General Assembly*, Oct. 27, 1802. The slave was a black woman who had acquired her freedom by contract and was accepted in the community as a free woman. Trenton (N.J.) *Federalist*, Nov. 20, 1807.

⁶³ Pierpont quoted in Stanton, *A History of Suffrage*, I, 451. *Centinel of Freedom*, Mar. 16, 1802.

⁶⁴ *True American*, Oct. 18, 1802.

during the first decade of the nineteenth century and reached its peak in hotly contested local and presidential elections when party machines moved into full gear.

Consequently, when Joseph Bloomfield, the state's first Republican governor, went to cast his vote at the poll, he was accompanied by "that part of his female household entitled to vote." And the *Federalist* "PIOUS SAINT of New Brunswick, who had pledged himself in the most positive manner that not a female should be brought on the election ground . . . was seen rallying the PETTICOAT ELECTORS, and hurrying them and others to the poll." In 1803, it was estimated that *Federalist* women cast 150 votes for the election of Jonathan Drayton to the Senate.⁶⁵ This was not an insignificant number, considering that New Jersey elections were often decided by a few votes.

Nor was women's participation in the political debate ended. Republican papers continued to publish women's views on a wide variety of issues. A mother writing under the pseudonym "Mary Meanwell" engaged in an ongoing debate concerning the incorporation of Newark, while a Miss Bannerman and a "Quaker woman" did not hesitate to render their opinion on that most masculine of subjects, war and peace.⁶⁶

Women did not confine their political activism to voting or to letter writing. In Trenton, *Federalist* women "of all colors" enraged Republicans by participating twice in anti-Paine riots "on account of his religious principles." And, when local party rivalry reached its peak, so did women's activism. In Newark, "the women vied with men, and in some instances eclipsed them, in 'stuffing' the ballot box."⁶⁷

This political activism seemed to have no effect on women's general relations with the state, which neither passed nor debated any special legislation designed to affect women's legal or economic rights. In fact, women's lives, like those of men, were largely determined by their economic conditions. Wealthy and middle-class women engaged in good works, and their daughters chose from a

⁶⁵ *Federalist Gazette*, Jan. 9, 1804; *Centinel of Freedom*, Nov. 20, 1804; Sir Augustine John Foster, *Jeffersonian America: Notes on the United States of America collected in the years 1805-6-7 and 11-12*. (San Marino, Cal. 1954), 280.

⁶⁶ *Centinel of Freedom*, Apr. 1, June 24, 1806, Mar. 3, 1807.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* Mar. 22, 1803; *Federalist New Jersey State Gazette*, July 16, 1804; Joseph Atkinson, *History of Newark, New Jersey, Being a Narrative of its Rise and Progress . . .* (Newark 1878), 143.

wide variety of private schools ready to accommodate them. Some schools, like the co-educational Newark Academy, boasted good libraries and offered a rigorous course of study that included geography, history and mathematics. Other schools, particularly those run by French refugees, offered a lighter fare, such as dancing, music and art. As for poor women, some worried about the increasing tax burden while others, including a growing number of revolutionary war widows, often found themselves in almshouses.⁶⁸

The presidential election of 1804 did bring a bonanza to the state's black population, including black women, in the form of "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery." The act was supported by Republicans, whose newspapers embarked on a campaign designed to capture the black vote in a manner reminiscent of that party's 1800 attempt to attract the single women's vote. Once again rhetoric kept pace with political expediency. Blacks were called "gentlemen," the views of "politicians of Color" were publicized and verses included such lines as, "Though black his skin as shades of night/His HEART is fair—His SOUL is White."⁶⁹

So what happened in 1807? Why did the state legislators suddenly exhibit a wanton disregard for their egalitarian principles as well as for the state constitution and pass an election law that defined voters exclusively as taxpaying adult white male citizens? And why did the Republicans succeed where the Federalists failed?

As had been the case throughout the struggle over female suffrage in New Jersey, the answers to all these questions were directly related to political expediency. In 1804 a group of restive, middle-of-the-road Republicans broke with the party and formed a third party movement. Successfully positioning themselves in the political center between Federalists and Republicans, these third party members attracted a significant number of Republican voters, including a number of moderate Republicans who stayed within the party but "favored the *Third party* system. That is not Federalism—but is very near a kin to it, and will soon be one of the *family*."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ The Newark Female Charitable Society was organized in 1803. See John T. Cunningham, *Newark* (Newark 1966), 88. On female education, see *Centinel of Freedom*, Feb. 3, 1802; and Thayer, *Elizabethtown*, 162. On the financial hardships of poor women, see *Centinel of Freedom*, Apr. 1, 1806; and William F. Ellis, "Public Welfare in New Jersey, 1630-1944," in *The Story of New Jersey*, ed. William Starr Myers (New York 1945), 9-11.

⁶⁹ *Centinel of Freedom*, Feb. 28, July 31, Oct. 2, 9, 1804.

⁷⁰ Trenton *Federalist*, Oct. 22, 1804. See also the circular letter of Matthew Clay

A major debate concerning suffrage developed during 1806-1807 between the moderate Republicans (both within and outside of the party) and the more liberal Republicans who made up most of the party proper. All Republicans agreed that the right to vote distinguishes "freeman from slaves." Moderate Republicans insisted that "as property . . . gives rise to legislation, and is almost the only subject of it, it is not unjust to deprive him who has none from a voice in elections." Liberal Republicans retorted that "a widow's mite is property" and so is the life and liberty of any "black, white, red or yellow" individual of "exotic or domestic birth." Therefore, "every person holding stocks in the funds of the community . . . is a member of the community, and has an undoubted right to vote for public office."⁷¹

The need to build a new court house in strongly Republican Essex County gravely exacerbated the intra-party rivalry between liberal and moderate Republicans. Southern Republicans supported placing the courthouse in Elizabeth Town, while northern Republicans insisted that the new courthouse remain in Newark. Unfortunately, the battle between northern and southern Republicans of Essex County paralleled the schism between liberal and moderate Republicans.⁷² The legislature ordered a countywide plebiscite to decide the question. It turned out to be a fiasco. Still, the concern the Republican leadership felt after the "nefarious" courthouse election, was dwarfed by their concern with the inability of the Essex County Republican party to bury the hatchet during the following state-wide election and agree on a unified ticket for the legislature. Consequently, the fall elections in 1807 did not pit Federalists against Republicans but moderate southern Republicans against liberal northern Republicans.⁷³ The liberal North won the elections, but

of Virginia in *Circular Letters of Congressmen to their Constituents 1789-1829*, ed. Noble E. Cunningham, Jr. (3 vols., Chapel Hill 1978), I 462-463. In 1805, New Jersey Quids from Salem, Gloucester, Sussex, Essex, and Cumberland counties won seats in the state legislature. Walter R. Fee, *The Transition from Aristocracy to Democracy in New Jersey* (Somerville N.J. 1933), 142; Trenton *Federalist*, Oct. 14, 1805; *Centinel of Freedom*, Oct. 15, 1805.

⁷¹ *Centinel of Freedom*, Sept. 30, Oct. 14, 1806; *Genius of Liberty*, July 31, Aug. 7, Oct. 2, 1806.

⁷² The moderate Republicans of Elizabeth Town supported taxpayer suffrage and tried to limit participation in the court house plebiscite to taxpayers. *Centinel of Freedom*, Oct. 7, 1806.

⁷³ New Jersey had a long tradition of voting irregularities, but this time, the numbers were astounding: 14,000 votes were cast in a county in which the total

southern Republicans remained unreconcilable and insisted on further embarrassing the Republican party by petitioning the legislature for the annulment of court house elections. They also demanded a restructuring of the state's electoral procedures.

It was at this point that the party leadership felt obligated to act. 1808 was a presidential election year, Jefferson's embargo was unpopular in New Jersey, and, without a united party, the Republicans feared they had little chance of winning. A compromise was worked out and unity returned to the Republican party. The courthouse plebiscite was annulled, but no new plebiscite was scheduled, and the new courthouse was eventually built in Newark. In return, Newark liberals acceded to the passage of an election law that limited the franchise to white taxpaying male citizens. Nontaxpayers were excluded in order to placate moderate Republicans, particularly those from southern Essex County, while aliens lost the franchise to Republican patriotism. Since the two groups were traditional Republican voters, the loss of their votes had to be balanced by the exclusion of traditional Federalist voters: single women and blacks.⁷⁴

Federalists had little reason to oppose the election law, whose main provisions they had advocated for a decade, particularly as they expected the number of votes lost to Republicans through the disqualification of aliens and the poor to exceed the number of votes lost to Federalists through the disqualification of women and blacks. Furthermore, Federalists could not be blamed for the unconstitutionality of a law which was prepared by a committee composed exclusively of Republicans.⁷⁵

population was about 22,000. See *New-Jersey Journal*, Feb. 17, 1807; and *Centinel of Freedom*, Oct. 20, 1807.

⁷⁴ The Federalists made a very strong showing during the 1806-1807 elections and undertook a major organizational effort in 1808. See Pasler and Pasler, *The New Jersey Federalists*, 125-129; *New-Jersey Journal*, Nov. 10, 1807; and *Trenton Federalist*, Nov. 30, 1807. The restrictive suffrage law was only one of a series of concessions liberal Republicans made in their successful effort to unite the party prior to the upcoming presidential election and end the third party movement in the state. Other concessions were related to appointments, as well as to commercial and judicial policies. The emancipation act was probably responsible for the disfranchisement of blacks as it had the potential for greatly increasing the number of black voters who continued to support the Federalist Party because of its antislavery position. The "privileged fair," especially those of Elizabeth Town, had long been a thorn in the side of Newark Republicans and the party despaired of the female vote by 1802.

⁷⁵ *Trenton Federalist*, Oct. 31, 1808.

Actually, the issue of constitutionality was the most formidable obstacle facing the Republican election law committee.⁷⁶ The Republican leadership could not be sure whether the legislators would consider the political advantages afforded them by the new law significant enough to overcome their constitutional scruples. So, "to try the sense of the house on the leading principle of the bill, a motion was made to strike out the first section." The first section stipulated that "from the passage of this act, no person shall vote . . . unless such a person is a free, white, male citizen of the state."⁷⁷

Lewis Condict of Morris, a moderate Republican and the chairman of the committee that designed the bill began the rewriting of history with "a most eloquent and impressive speech." He defended the bill by arguing that the authors of the constitution could not have intended to enfranchise women, blacks, and aliens and that the corruption which prevailed in state elections necessitated the disfranchisement of these groups. Clearly, the deck was stacked, as "no reply was attempted."⁷⁸ The 1807 election law enjoyed bipartisan support and passed through the legislature with maximum speed and minimum debate. In 1799 the Federalists failed to convince the people that male taxpayer suffrage was to their benefit. In 1807 the Republicans failed to ask them.

The first instance of active female participation in the formal political process ended not with a bang but a whimper. Many New Jerseyans, including the noted jurist and state Supreme Court judge, L.Q.C. Elmer, regarded the new election law as unconstitutional but neither women, blacks nor aliens challenged the law in court prior to the revision of the state constitution in 1844. This was the case despite

⁷⁶ The issue played a central role in the contemporary debate over female suffrage. Other states rewrote their constitutions, but New Jersey refused to do so. Cognizant of this difficulty, historians attributed female enfranchisement to the election law of 1790 and not to the constitution. However, such an attribution is historically erroneous and ignores the repeated assertions to the contrary by both Federalists and Republicans. See Turner, "Women's Suffrage in New Jersey: 1790-1807;" Pole, "Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807;" and Gertzog, "Female Suffrage in New Jersey, 1790-1807."

⁷⁷ *Genius of Liberty*, Nov. 19, 1807; *New Jersey General Assembly, Minutes of Votes and Proceedings* (Trenton 1808), Nov. 16, 1807.

⁷⁸ *Genius of Liberty*, Nov. 19, 1807. It is important to distinguish between Lewis Condict who was first elected in 1805 and the founder and formidable leader of the Republican party, Silas Condict, who died in 1801. Lewis Condict should also be distinguished from John Condit of Newark who was almost defeated by the women of Elizabeth Town in 1798.

the fact that the New Jersey Supreme Court was the first state court to void a law for being contrary to the constitution.⁷⁹

Actually, women were the only group who could have mounted an effective legal challenge to the new law. As the winds of war with European belligerents were blowing ever more strongly, the loyalty and trustworthiness of aliens came under growing scrutiny. In addition, the new law hurt aliens the least since their disfranchisement was merely temporary and their exclusion so unevenly enforced. Neither was this the time for blacks to rock the boat since they still had to contend with yearly petitions challenging the legislature's 1804 gradual emancipation of slaves. White women operated under no comparable pressures. After all, the state had a substantial number of *femmes sole* with property, education and community standing who could have led a legal assault on the election law.

Mary Philbrooke, the state's first female lawyer who in 1912 tried to use the constitution of 1776 in order to regain the vote for women, argued that an attempt to challenge the law in 1807 would have been futile. She pointed out that "the council, which was the upper branch of the legislature, had the right to pass upon the subject as a court of last resort, not withstanding the fact that the Supreme Court had pronounced against it."⁸⁰

The legal barrier was but one of the many barriers that prevented women from mobilizing effectively in defense of their political rights. Marital status, class, and color probably presented even more formidable obstacles to the coalition building that would have been necessary to mount a successful challenge to the state's legislature. Women's political efficacy was severely circumscribed by the fact that only single women were eligible to vote. Young women could vote before they got married, stopped voting once they got married, regained the right when they became widows, and lost it again if they chose to remarry. Furthermore, it might not have escaped the politically sophisticated Federalist widows of New Jersey that their voting rights were firmly tied to those of blacks and aliens. Consequently, they might have preferred to lose their right of suffrage rather than re-enfranchise those they considered inferior to themselves. A contemporary English diplomat remarked:

⁷⁹ L.Q.C. Elmer, *The Constitution and Government of the Province and State of New Jersey* . . . (Newark 1872), 49; Irving S. Kull, ed., *New Jersey, A History* (6 vols., New York 1930-1932), III, 457-458. The constitutionality of the law became a central feature in 1838 of the election scandal which is known as the "broad seal war."

⁸⁰ *Carpenter v. Cornish*.

I afterwards heard that there had been a bill introduced into the State Assembly which was likely to pass into law, for depriving the fair sex of their right of voting at elections. Perhaps the men they chose thought to be too aristocratical, for ladies have the reputation of hating democracy as well as demagogues.⁸¹

Be that as it may, New Jersey women, victims or correspondents, were demoted for over a hundred years to the conditions of "slaves, considered as complete vassals, who had no voice to utter in choosing their rulers." Predictably, ideology went hand in hand with policy. Women lost not only their right to participate in the political process, but also their image as virtuous individuals with "a heart light as cork, and a mind free as air."⁸²

Instead, the writers of the day, justified the disfranchisement of women by emphasizing their irrationality and pliancy. Such qualities were incompatible with the independence of heart and mind so essential to those deemed fit to be active participants in the body politic. The avid newspaper reading mother was gone, as was the assertive wife and the fiercely independent young maid. They were replaced by emotionally motivated women whose sole purpose in life was to please. The differences between these women and the strong, independent, and rational men were such that no advocate of republican virtue could place them on an equal footing in any matter of consequence. Thus, along with the right of suffrage for single women, all New Jersey women lost the right to be treated with the respect accorded to a free citizen of the Republic:

Man is nerv'd with strength complete,
 Woman beautiful we meet.
 Man is brave, though death be nigh,
 Woman timid and will fly.
 Man is great in enterprise,
 Woman great in suffering lies,
 Man is best abroad displayed,
 Woman loveliest in shade.
 Man speaks when reason's ray he sees,

⁸¹ Foster, *Jeffersonian America*, 280. Robert Gross noted the apparent correlation between republican womanhood and the consolidation of middle-class gentry. See, Linda K. Kerber, Nancy F. Cott, Robert Gross, Lynn Hunt, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Christine M. Stansell, "Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres: Thinking about Gender in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 46 (July 1989), 574-575.

⁸² *Genius of Liberty*, Aug. 14, 1806; *Centinel of Freedom*, Oct. 21, 1800.

Woman to persuade or please.
 Man of rough unbending will,
 Woman soft and tender still,
 Man is bright by science grav's,
 Woman by superior taste.
 Man judges with facility,
 Woman with sensibility.
 Man severely just you meet,
 Woman beams in mercy sweet!⁸³

So, how does this piece of the historical puzzle help complete the picture of the early republic as a whole and clarify the place of women in it? If the New Jersey case proves anything, it is the centrality of electoral politics in American history. The growth of gender ideology was not the reason for the disfranchisement of women. Power politics was. As the contemporary British diplomat Augustus John Foster immediately understood, women lost the vote because they tended to vote for the wrong party. After all, "politics are no abstract things; they exist only in their relations to positive facts and occurrences."⁸⁴ This does not mean that social and ideological frames of reference were unimportant. They were useful in providing the excuse for cancelling single women's right to vote. Thus, the traditional exclusion of women from the political arena indubitably made the justification of their disfranchisement easier. The story of female suffrage in New Jersey, however, shows that these frames of reference were flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of gender relations. Therefore, politicians had no greater difficulty justifying the enfranchisement of single women than their disfranchisement.

That representational principles were on the side of single women's suffrage was obvious to republicans here and abroad. After all, if property ownership was the qualifying principle, single women who owned it had a right to represent their own property and if paying taxes was the determining factor why should single women with such an obligation have to "experience taxation without representation?"⁸⁵ The same logic obviously applied to free blacks

⁸³ *Genius of Liberty*, Sept. 15, 1807.

⁸⁴ Lewis M. Ogden, *An Oration in the Presbyterian Church at Newark, July 4, 1803* (Newark 1803), 6.

⁸⁵ St. George Tucker, the noted Virginian jurist, quoted in Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 140. In both Britain and revolutionary France proponents of suffrage extension were confronted with the question of female suffrage. See Stanton, ed., *History of Women Suffrage*, I, 453; Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York 1988), 119; and Landes, *Women and The Public Sphere*, 112-114.

and aliens. Still, the passage of taxpayer suffrage was accompanied by the disfranchisement of these groups on the novel ground that they were qualitatively different. Women were too genteel, blacks inferior and aliens untrustworthy.

Historians have demonstrated the manner in which the post-revolutionary society became infused with racism and nationalism. Historians of gender have described the way in which women's nature was redefined so as to make women appear uniquely suitable for the fulfillment of a specialized role as the guardians of the Republic's virtue in the informal political arena, but as unsuitable for participation in the formal political arena. The development of these divisive ideologies, however, should not be viewed as the causes of the growing tendency to exclude women, blacks, and aliens from the formal political arena during the nineteenth century. Rather, as Linda Kerber noted, "restricting women's politicization was one of a series of conservative choices that Americans made in the postwar years as they avoided the full implication of their own revolutionary radicalism."⁸⁶ The exclusion of blacks and aliens can be viewed in the same light.

Still, the New Jersey case study seems to suggest that these conservative decisions were not made by Americans per se, but by a Republican elite determined to reverse the wide diffusion of power that it no longer found politically profitable or controllable. Ideologies of race, gender and nationality were used to provide this reversal with a principled basis. After all, it should not be forgotten that this same elite used the natural rights rhetoric when it found it politically expedient to promote the very diffusion of power it later sought to reverse. As a matter of fact, the marginalization and distortion of the story of the "petticoat electors" demonstrates just how successful these ideologies were in masking the realities of the past.

⁸⁶ Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 287.