*Modern Intellectual History*, 4, 1 (2007), pp. 173–190 
doi:10.1017/S1479244306001120 Printed in the United Kingdom

# IS THERE AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF EARLY AMERICAN WOMEN?

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Catherine Kerrison, *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005)

Susan Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004)

Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2006)

Consider Abigail Adams. Known to us mostly through over one thousand letters that she exchanged with her husband, John Adams, she was a woman of redoubtable intelligence and energy. Wife of the second president of the United States, she was mother to its sixth. She traveled to France and England, rubbing elbows with dukes and diplomats; she read deeply in history and literature; she supported the literacy of black children; she was a conduit for the American reception of Catharine Macaulay's republican-friendly *History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line* (1763–8). The letters between John and Abigail fly so fast and furious, are so full of learned banter and palpable yearning, that their marriage appears strikingly modern, a union of equals. Let us not be deceived. Abigail Adams, like other women of her generation even in the social stratosphere, had no formal schooling, and her erudition was dwarfed by the massive learning bestowed upon John. He had a Harvard BA and read law for three years. He took for granted a vast public arena in which to unleash his colossal, if tortured, political ambitions. Abigail never published a word.

Was Abigail Adams an intellectual? Does she have a place in American intellectual history? Answering "yes" to either of those questions risks opening up the project of intellectual history so broadly that it becomes indistinguishable from any other kind of history. Abigail Adams was neither particularly well educated nor unusually systematic in her thought. She authored no treatise, founded no school, and gathered no acolytes, and the epistolary exchanges that

constitute the evidence we have for her community of discourse never took institutional form. No reasonable historian would argue that her ideas were as publicly influential as those of John Adams during her lifetime or after.

But to answer "no" to the same two questions risks draining some of the real significance from the transatlantic republic of letters that structured so much of intellectual life in Europe and the Americas at this time. An imagined trans-national community of *érudits*, without formal institutional structure, the republic of letters allowed women to occupy places of intellectual sociability that were relatively more egalitarian than the other social locations (say, marriage) they might occupy. It was knit as much by informal practices of letter-writing as by publication, the latter an activity deemed unbecoming for women and therefore less open to them than letter-writing and manuscript circulation. Porous and informal, the republic of letters helped to nurture, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the first generation of women to form a sustained female intellectual life in British America. British America was the provincial fringe of a larger world of elite women whose intellectual endeavors could flourish in a semi-private context relatively more accepting of their efforts than the public sphere of politics. With concepts of authorship and the professions still nascent, with no one particularly impressed by university degrees (certainly they were not required for university employment), and with nationalist literary agendas still embryonic, the republic of letters supported a trans-oceanic community of learned women whose interests spanned the range of erudition: botany, astronomy, classicism, literature, politics.

To be sure, many barriers remained. Women struggled against convictions that their sex had feeble minds and fiery passions, that they represented passive "nature" to men's probing "culture." They had little or no access to formal education; they had few public outlets for their learning beyond the salons and tea tables that supported their intellectual ventures; their participation in the republic of letters tended to be more as consumers than as producers. And while the relatively open eighteenth-century concept of "learning" embraced such practical subjects as surveying and navigation, it did not include equally useful tasks like sewing and cooking. Learned women were tolerated in part because they were viewed as glittering exceptions to their sex, to be admired but not broadly emulated.

Despite such obstacles, eighteenth-century British North America produced not just Abigail Adams of Massachusetts, but Eliza Lucas Pinckney of South Carolina, who pioneered the cultivation of indigo and read Virgil and Plutarch (the former possibly in Latin since she knew that language, the latter probably in English translation since she did not know how to read ancient Greek), schooled her daughter (in Latin) and some of her slaves (in English). It also produced Jane Colden (1724–66) of New York, whose botanic manuscript is a marvel of scientific classification, festooned with delightful illustrations of local flora. Also

from this fertile ground came Phillis Wheatley (1753–84) of Massachusetts, black and enslaved, one of the first African Americans (man or woman) to publish anything, in her case a work of widely read poetry deeply rooted in biblical and classical erudition.[1] These women were giants in British North American women's intellectual life in the eighteenth century, provincial versions of British bluestockings like Elizabeth Carter (who translated Epictetus), French *femmes savantes* like Anne Dacier (who translated Homer), and even those rarest of hothouse flowers, the Italian women who occupied university posts in Newtonian science.[2] We know most of the American women from their erudite letters and manuscripts more than their publications, which were few and infrequent, given the intolerance for women's shows of learning. Some of these letters and private papers are now available in searchable online formats, like the letters between Abigail and John Adams at the Massachusetts Historical Society and the database entitled North American Women's Letters and Diaries.

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The case of Abigail Adams invites us to ask the question that heads this essay: is there an intellectual history of early American women? This question can be read two ways. First, do we learn anything new by qualifying the project of "American intellectual history" with the words "early" and "women?" As a social group, American women were systematically undereducated until the late nineteenth century. Do they have anything meaty or even interesting to offer to the intellectual historian who delights in charting rich mental worlds and untangling gnarled intellectual genealogies?

Second, does there currently exist a body of historiography that we might term "the intellectual history of early American women"? Putting the term "intellectual history" into a book's title seems to give authors (and publishers) pause; currently, the life of the female mind is often most clearly exposed in books

[1] *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739–1762*, ed. Elise Pinckney (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972); *Botanic Manuscript of Jane Colden, 1724–1766*, ed. H. W. Rickett and Elizabeth C. Hall (New York: Garden Club of Orange and Duchess Counties, 1963); Julian Mason, Jr., ed., *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

[2] On learned women in Britain in the eighteenth century see Sylvia Harcstark Myers, *The Bluestocking Cirle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Norma Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004); on Spain, Theresa Ann Smith, *The Emerging Female Citizen: Gender and Enlightenment in Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); on female scientists in Italy, Paula Findlen, "Science as a Career in Enlightenment Italy: The Strategies of Laura Bassi," *Isis*, 84 (1993), 441–69.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306001120 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that announce themselves as studies of reading, writing, literacy, education, or, more broadly, "culture." The reluctance to term such studies "intellectual history" results perhaps from a hunch that the project called "intellectual history" has not always been something particularly friendly to the study of women. There is good reason for this hunch. Some of the most influential texts that we use to teach American intellectual history either include little or no specific focus on the lives of erudite women or are structured so that early women's intellectual output seems peripheral to the "big" questions of public life. This has something to do with the fact that women's systematic undereducation made them less intellectually productive and less intellectually influential than men on the public stage, especially before the early nineteenth century. Unless one organizes a sourcebook around the idea of "cultures of intellectual life" there does not seem to be a way around this gender imbalance for the early period. Conversely, principal teaching texts in American women's history consider women's education and entrance into the teaching professions but not so much a larger, more expansive "intellectual life." This may be the result of the long alliance between social history and women's history: while that union has helped to illuminate the experience of the vast majority of women who were not particularly educated, it has been less successful in shedding light on the world of more intellectually engaged women.[3]

So where do we go from here?

Let us begin with the first question (is this an interesting or even viable project?) and look at three recently published books that might arguably be called intellectual histories of early American women (though only one has the word "intellectual" in its title). Covering the period before roughly 1865, when a college education, equivalent in rigor to what men of the same age received,

[3] Of the numerous influential essays included in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), none focus specifically on learned women. David Hollinger and Charles Capper, *The American Intellectual Tradition*, 5th edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), Vol. 1 (to 1865) includes seven women among its thirty-eight entries, or roughly 18.4 percent. The percentage of women drops in Volume 2, to ten women among its fifty-nine entries, or 16.9 percent. Juliet Gardiner, ed., *What Is History Today?* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988) considers "intellectual history" (in which no books about women appear) separately from "women's history." For women's history, I have used as representatives pedagogical samples Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, *Major Problems in American Women's History*, 2nd edn (Lexington: D. C. Heath, 1996); Ellen Carol DuBois, *Through Women's Eyes: An American History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2005); Nancy Cott, ed., *History of Women in the United States, Volume 12: Education* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1993); Nancy Woloch, comp., *Early American Women: A Documentary History 1600–1900*, 2nd edn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997); Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, *Women and Power in American History, Volume 1: To 1880*, 2nd edn (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002).

became a real possibility for more than a handful of women, the books reveal the importance of close attention to women's social and intellectual networks, to the unpublished world of diaries, letters, and commonplace books, and to material culture.

Catherine Kerrison's *Claiming the Pen: Women and Intellectual Life in the Early American South* studies the intellectual world of elite southern white women in the late eighteenth century, a time when "female reading and writing literacy lagged so far behind men's that a women's intellectual history appeared inconceivable" (4). Formal education was haphazard even for elite southern boys; girls could expect to receive only the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and among elites such "accomplishments" as music, embroidery, and dance. Noting that a number of studies have illuminated the intellectual world of antebellum southern women, and more still have presumed women's experience in the North and mid-Atlantic to be the norm rather than regional variations, she argues that her study will reveal "women's reading and writing habits as practices of southern femininity" (4). Kerrison argues that elite, white southern women were at once colonizers, colonized, and resisters. As colonizers, they often identified with men of their class and always with their race; as colonized, they accepted to a large degree men's insistence that they were the weaker sex; but as resisters, they used their reading to exercise personal autonomy in a rigidly patriarchal society. Through reading, elite southern white women "found the authority to produce their own advice literature" (mostly in the form of advice to female relatives in letters) along with "a model of femininity distinct from that of male advice authors" (5).

Kerrison focuses chiefly on advice literature and novels, two genres that dominated women's reading. We know about women's access to these texts because women talked about their reading in their diaries, letters, and commonplace books, but Kerrison also ingeniously mines account books, inventories, wills, and receipts to track female ownership patterns. Even if readers fault Kerrison for gliding over long lists of novels and conduct manuals rather than delving deeply into a few, they can still admire her ability to trace the fragile female networks of ideas and correspondents, some of the reasons why women found books of particular kinds appealing.

She is especially interested in advice literature, a genre that "comprised the bulk of what girls read, in educations that were vastly circumscribed" (186). Most of this conduct-of-life literature was written by men, in England; a good bit of it, like James Fordyce's *Sermons for Young Women* (1765), was directed at women. Enjoining them to pious conduct, it also linked colonial women to a transatlantic world of gentility and to elite southern women's sense of their rank in a slave society. These devotional works "reinforced divine imperative for the ordering of society" (48) in these racially divided colonies, helping white women to dominate their slaves even as they buckled under male superiority (63). In a chapter on

women and religion, Kerrison argues that the heart religion popularized during the late eighteenth century "changed the way women responded to their faith." Because they were barred from formal church leadership, they used this new world of feeling (believed to be a particularly feminine one) to forge a "sense of their spiritual autonomy and confidence" (81). They poured this new religious feeling into the support of churches disestablished during the Revolutionary period; this activity in turn laid the groundwork for the more public work of the next generation of women, who by the 1830s expanded their influence into establishing schools, appealing to legislatures, and raising funds for charitable efforts. A chapter on novels views these popular texts as part of women's informal education. Novels contained morals lessons "about life, and love, virtue and debasement, triumph and disaster" (106). Kerrison shows that some women engaged seriously with the intellectual content of these stories, as when Eliza Lucas critiqued Samuel Richardson's depiction of women in his wildly popular *Pamela* (116). With their female-centered plot lines and, as often as not, female authors, novels helped women to "imagine a world different from the one they knew" (111), prepared them for gentility and motherhood, and most importantly gave southern women a sense that women could be proper subjects of inquiry (129).

Kerrison's glimpse inside the largely private intellectual world of early southern women should banish any notion that the early south—male or female—lacked intellectual activity. Her book leaves open the question of when and whether (barring the topic of proslavery apologetics, which became a southern cottage industry after the 1820s) we can begin to spot a distinct regional intellectual life in America, either among men or women. Kerrison is careful to qualify her usage of the term "the south" for this early period, arguing that it was chiefly distinguishable as a region because it was a slave society. But since she does not supply a comparison with other areas (except to say that in general southern women read and wrote less than women in the mid-Atlantic and New England), we have to take her word for the argument that women who lived in this slave society read different books, or read books differently, than educated women elsewhere.

Going further still, we might ask how far—geographically—early "southern" women's correspondence networks extended, and so challenge our ideas of what it meant to be southern at this time, or even colonial. Recent books like Fred Anderson's *Crucible of War* (2000)—on the Seven Year's War—have shown that ostensibly "colonial" wars were in fact waged globally, from the heart of Iroquois country to the Caribbean to Madras to Manila.[4] What happens to our idea of

[4] Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306001120 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the southern nature of women's intellectual lives if we map the range of their travels and correspondents? Some of the women Kerrison discusses remained deeply embedded in "the south" to be sure, but others traveled in and wrote to a much broader world. Take Eliza Lucas Pinckney of South Carolina, who was born in Antigua, lived for some time in England, and cultivated a transatlantic network of correspondents; or Martha Laurens Ramsay, who spent formative years in England; or Alice Delancey Izard, a southerner only by marriage (she was raised in Westchester, New York), who traveled from London to Italy with her husband in the mid-1770s, making her one of the first American women to embark on anything remotely resembling the Grand Tour. These ephemeral but expansive epistolary networks suggest that part of being a "southern intellectual woman" in the eighteenth century meant transcending regionalism and living a kind of transatlanticism.

Susan Stabile's *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* moves us into the mid-Atlantic region, showing what can be done when scholars pay close attention to material culture. Her study of the erudite community of women in the greater Philadelphia area from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth is based as much on women's reading and writing as on a rich world of artifacts: shell grottos, meticulously arranged parlors and hallways, and the bizarre "mourning brooches" stuffed with plaits of a dead relative's hair, relics of an age that took a more hands-on approach to death and dying than we do today. She focuses on a coterie of women writers in the Delaware Valley: Deborah Logan (1761–1839), Susanna Wright (1697–1784), Hannah Griffitts (1727–1817), Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson (1737–1801), and Annis Stockton (1736–1801). Each was a formidable intellectual in her own right, but links by blood or marriage to prominent families of the era gave this coterie advantages other women did not have, and a few of them used their homes as literary salons. They also circulated their (unpublished) commonplace books of poetry from approximately the year 1760 to 1840.

Stabile's project is one not just of recovering a lost female intellectual community (if that is not too strong a word for such fragile, non-institutional networks). She also wants to salvage a whole female-centered manuscript culture and in the process to rehabilitate female ways of knowing in a society that denied women formal education and condemned their intellectual projects. Such an undertaking expands on Dena Goodman's retrieval of women's central role in the salons of the French Enlightenment by adding material culture to the study of institutions and discourses.[5] "By adapting commonplacing and other domestic

[5] Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244306001120 Published online by Cambridge University Press

arts into a feminine art of artificial memory, these well-educated, privileged, literary women forwarded a unique way of knowing, which undercut, subverted, and reapplied what might be understood as a limited female intellectual capacity" (16). In a new republic whose men were besotted with the idea of creating a new nationalism based on myth (the Founding Fathers) and ritual (the Fourth of July parade), women quietly set to work on the related but more intimate project of memory-making through genealogy. With the locality and especially the home as their forum, they worked against the homogenizing effects of national mythmaking by focusing on what was particular and unique. Going further with the notion of a separable women's world of intellectual and artistic activity, Stabile argues that the women of her study represent a counterstrain to the Enlightenment. "Exemplified by their manuscript commonplace books, women's memory practices adapted the eighteenth century's new modes of learning based on accumulation, order, and classification into a feminine art of collecting" (12). Women's collections of personal souvenirs—portrait miniatures, mirrors, fans—were circulated among other women as an alternative to the masculine habits of collecting embodied in museums, cabinets, and portfolios. These souvenirs manifested women's personal pasts, not a mythic national past.

Stabile's book implicitly invites us to revise the emphasis in recent works—by David Waldstreicher and Michael Warner—on the importance of published, print culture in forging nationalism and civic memory in the early republic.[6] Stabile's world is truly a "female world," a term used frequently in this century. It pointed inward to individual experience, and especially to female experience. As a literary scholar, Stabile is less concerned than historians are to chart chronological progression over time, and some readers may be troubled by her lack of discrimination among sources of different centuries; for a book that spans the period roughly from 1760 to 1840, we have little sense of before and after, of the precise means by which critical transformations in women's intellectual lives took place. Her aim seems less to chart precise intellectual genealogies of influence than to excavate the lost cultural practices of elite women's reading, writing, and memorializing in the eighteenth century, with the aim of showing how those were erased by the transition to a nationhood that required a "public" memory. For these reasons historians interested in a more linear this-caused-that progression of events maybe be frustrated by *Memory's Daughters*, but the book is nonetheless commendable in its insistence that material culture must be a central focus of the study of the primarily unpublished, private eighteenth-century women's culture.

[6] David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

The third book under review, Mary Kelley's *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*, moves the story forward to the period from 1790 to 1860, a new epoch in the intellectual history of American women. Kelley's purpose is to highlight the role of female academies in one of the most profound transformations in gender relations in United States history: the movement of large numbers of women into civil society, into the world of public activism and published authorship. According to Kelley, the academies were "decisive" in "recasting women's subjectivity and the felt reality of their collective experience" (1). Her claim for the role of the academies is ambitious: "Nearly all of the women who claimed these careers [as teachers, writers, and editors] and who led the movement of women into the world beyond their household were schooled at these institutions" (2). In what Kelley calls "a significant revision of republican womanhood," her subjects insisted "that the reach of female influence be extended to men and women other than the members of one's immediate family" (49). Kelley charts what she calls the transition from "republican womanhood" (directing female activity into family and home) to "gendered republicanism" (channeling female activity outward to civil society, even while acknowledging that it was done for the benefit of society, not for self-actualization). In significant numbers, women after 1790 became participants in civil society, publicly active but also sensitive to and restricted by gender norms that required stated motives of selflessness for public action.

Kelley's book contributes substantially to our knowledge of women's higher education during the antebellum period. She shows (81) that by the Civil War era, roughly the same percentage of young women attended academies as young men attended college. Like the young men who attended college, these young women were elite or middle class; they tended to be a few years younger than college men, though age segregation was not as rigid as it is today (85); most were white. This basic documentation is in itself an extraordinary accomplishment, a result of Kelley's tenacious burrowing in archives. According to Kelley's count, between 1790 and 1830, 182 academies were established just for young women in North and South; at least 158 more were opened between 1830 and 1860 (67). In many cases, young women learned much the same subjects that that young men did, as ornamental subjects like penmanship and embroidery gave way to topics like mathematics, science, moral philosophy, Latin, and Greek. As often as not, the pedagogy, typically for this era, was one of rote memorization; one commiserates with the girl who called her academy a "Brain Factory" (72).

Kelley is concerned with what we might call the "external" features of women's intellectual life—that is, the result of women's learning for their personal aspirations. She argues that women at the academies self-consciously created themselves as participants in the civil society of the young republic. In this she expands upon the insights noted in 1979 by Anne Firor Scott in her influential

study of the diffusion of "feminist" values at the Troy Female Seminary.[7] Through access to higher learning, argues Kelley, women who attended female academies began to imagine themselves and other women as proper agents and subjects of civil society. The importance of the academies in Kelley's telling is that they trained women to think of themselves as learned and therefore capable of public action, of shaping national public opinion. This was a new kind of self-perception that women learned in academies and reading circles and then maintained in adulthood through female-centered local, regional, and national networks that lauded women's erudition and encouraged women's participation in civil society. Kelley uses the words "performance" and "cultural capital" a number of times to stress how this educational movement was severely circumscribed by class and race: women in academies "performed" their class identities there, gaining "cultural capital" to later pursue public careers. The curriculum in these schools, that is, reaffirmed these young women's economic and social advantages to the detriment of others who did not participate as readily in what Kelley calls "the cultural work of nationalism" (78).

Kelley has clearly exposed the importance of the academies in forging a new sense of a public self for women. Important as its contributions are, her study leaves some questions unanswered. First, Kelley seems reluctant to explore what other motivations women had for attending academies than "learning to stand and speak." She deftly explains those pillars of reforming zeal like Harriet Beecher Stowe who chose the *vita activa*; what of the women who chose the *vita contemplativa*, of thoughtful retreat into what one might call pure scholarship or cerebration? We find here a wonderful vignette of the young Emily Dickinson recoiling with horror from a public oration at her female academy in an act that hinted at her future life of solitude; what did the academies do for the other Dickinsons of the world? Skimming lightly over many disciplines and genres in her extensive descriptions of the reading program at the academies, Kelley might have probed more deeply the rich, meaty substance of these women's books, the formal content of women's ideas. Can we tie these women's mental life to recognizable contemporary intellectual currents in England or on the Continent, of which we hear very little in this book? Would any of the graduates of the female academies have self-identified as, say, a theologian or an astronomer? And if not, why not? Did familial identities like "mother" or "daughter" continue to trump an incipient "disciplinary" identity?

Second, Kelley might have made more of the fact that several factors made the academies less than colleges: the roll call of academic subjects looked roughly the

7 Anne Firor Scott, "The Ever Widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary 1822–1872," *History of Education Quarterly* 19 (1979), 3–25.

same on paper, but in practice the difference must have been palpable. The girls were younger than boys in college, on the whole; many simply could not have pursued subjects as deeply as did young men. Nor do the academies appear to have profited from the influx of German-educated faculty and Germanic pedagogy that began to enliven men's colleges in the antebellum period. Teaching Charles Rollin's *Ancient History* to girls in 1839, as the Geneva Female Seminary of New York apparently did, was almost criminally primeval as a pedagogy; the *Ancient History*, first published in the 1730s, had become the butt of jokes by professors in elite male colleges who styled themselves the dazzling avant-garde. This is not to say that the female academies were not offering something more rigorous and systematic than what had been available before for young women. But Kelley may be overstating her case when she says that the academies provided "a course of study that matched that of male colleges" (3). Why, then, the need for the women's colleges of the post-Civil War era? From what reforming impulse did these emerge?

This brings us finally to the theme of female separatism, so important in the history of women's institution-building from the monasteries of the Middle Ages to the present day. First, it is unclear what effect the totally female environment of the academy had in creating that first generation of women who would stand up and speak, and how this self-conscious separatism linked to the establishment of women's colleges after the Civil War (institutions, incidentally, that Kelley has chosen not to connect to her academies, except very briefly at the end of her book). Estelle Freedman observed nearly three decades ago that separatism could be a fact of life that bolstered the status quo or a strategy for radical change.[8] Which was it in the female academies?

One is tempted to find in Kerrison, Stabile, and Kelley a story of gradual and hard-won improvement in women's literacy, education, and access to scholarly life, though all three authors wisely resist such enticements. Taken together, in fact, the books suggest the need to explore what was lost when the relatively open, transatlantic republic of letters of the eighteenth century yielded by the late nineteenth century to a modern intellectual structure, with its emphasis on a degree-holding and degree-granting university faculty (whose rituals, obligations, and standards of retention tended to exclude women) and a more market-driven literary world (that supported many more female authors but in which the doctrine of innate, biological female difference continued to stigmatize women's efforts). Ultimately the civil society Mary Kelley's women entered was a profoundly masculine one, with suffrage limited

[8] Estelle B. Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870–1930," *Feminist Studies*, 5 (Fall 1979), 512–29.

to men, with continued legal and economic disabilities for women, and with few employment outlets that offered women a liveable wage for satisfying work, whether scholarly or not. Late nineteenth-century civil society mirrored the modern university system it spawned: both admitted women but were not worlds friendly to women. Exceptionally intelligent women in the late nineteenth century could join the public world of standing and speaking and attend colleges whose rigor truly matched those of elite men's colleges. But this was also the generation that saw the need to create the all-female college (what one historian has called an "Adamless Eden"), where women could read, write, think, and talk unfettered by continuing prejudice against educated women.[9]

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Is all this "intellectual history"? When asked to define what intellectual history is, scholars have ventured a number of suggestions: it is the history of people thinking, of the discourse of intellectuals, of people arguing, of unit ideas over time, of those who produce and/or consume knowledge, of communities of knowledge, of the deliberations of the most informed members of society. The list could go on. Does an intellectual history of American women do more than just add women and stir, or is the fundamental project of "doing intellectual history" changed when we take seriously the idea that women had serious thoughts about serious matters, ideas that influenced those around them (if not as often as men's did)? We risk running into the trap of asking, "but where are the women?" without pausing to ask how attention to women would change the way we do our work. Likewise, historians—by definition students of what is particular to a time and place—should fear to tread into the dangerous territory of seeking particularly "female ways of knowing," which transcend time and place. An intellectual history of women can still aim for whatever attracted us to this line of historical research in the first place (presumably an interest in how and why ideas are formulated, circulated, revised, and abandoned), but with attention especially to four methodological issues.

First, as the books by Kerrison, Stabile, and Kelley so well illustrate, it should investigate what women did and said, and only secondarily turn to what men did and said about women or the creation and articulation of the categories of gender. While the last two are important projects that can be subsumed under the first (or stand alone), they should not detain us from the intimidating task of

9 Patricia Palmieri, *In Adamless Eden: The Community of Women Faculty at Wellesley* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

recovering the sources that will tell us most about the history of women thinking. These sources can be difficult to find. Women's intellectual traces tend to be in manuscript, an unpublished world that flourished alongside the published world in diaries, letters, and the commonplace books in which women copied snippets of poetry and prose they found meaningful. Equally illuminating are women's marginalia and ownership marks in the published books to which they had access, in which women were essentially in conversation with the author they were reading. Although Stabile has moved us along in this direction, we still await full study of women's marginalia along the lines of what we have for, say, John Adams.[10]

Second, historians—such meticulous readers of texts—need to follow Stabile's lead and look carefully at material culture to capture the totality of the world of women thinking. We should probably talk more to art historians (who have recently called for their own to talk more to us).[11] Desks and bookcases just for women began to be made in the late eighteenth century. Beyond objects, the functioning of aesthetic networks offers clues to how women participated in intellectual activities. In her book *The Bonds of Civility* (2005), the sociologist Eiko Ikegami has shown how aesthetic networks in pre-modern Japan played roles functionally similar to civic networks in Western political history.[12] Ikegami calls this sphere an "aesthetic public"; regardless of one's personal taste for Habermasian analysis, her work invites us to study more carefully the American women who came together voluntarily to produce or consume "art" broadly construed, and to take seriously the way women intervened in the disposition of "art" objects. What does it mean for American women's status as cultural or intellectual arbiters, for example, that in the early nineteenth century American women began to lend or even bequeath their prized family portraits to museums, rather than simply displaying them in the family parlor? The records of such major institutions as the Boston Athenaeum are full of such transactions but have yet to be thoroughly analyzed as signs of female presence in a shifting "aesthetic public."

Third, we should continue to act on the assumption that knowledge exists only within communities of discourse, and to examine those communities not just for the presence of women but for how that presence shaped the knowledge arising from those communities. For example, because women were excluded

[10] Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

[11] See the essays by Wendy Bellion, Maurie McInnis, and Ellen G. Miles in *American Art*, 19, 2 (Summer 2005), 2–25.

[12] Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

from institutions like the American Philosophical Society (founded 1743), they relied on informal connections such as the mentor, of which we have no full study yet. Sometimes the mentor was a woman; more often it was a man. Enshrined in women's reading in such eighteenth-century bestsellers as Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus*—where Minerva, goddess of wisdom, is disguised as a man named Mentor—the male mentor connected erudite women to learned societies at home and abroad. And since the history of early women is also the history of families, we should ask how profound female intelligence or erudition altered family dynamics. For all the eighteenth-century rhetoric about the importance of mothers in educating their children, the fact remained that the discovery of a Minerva in the nursery often demanded the attentions of the father, usually the most highly educated member of the family. The historical record is full of fathers who funneled personal and familial resources into nurturing an exceptionally intelligent and able daughter, like Margaret Fuller, Louisa McCord, Martha Laurens Ramsay, Theodosia Burr, and Catharine Beecher. The learned-father–learned-daughter relationship was prized in other societies that Americans at this time admired, like ancient Rome, and it is a topic worth investigating more fully. And despite the rhetoric that learned women were doomed to a life of spinsterhood, all the women above except Beecher married. Sometimes the union was intellectually fruitful for the woman (given eighteenth-century constraints), as with Martha Laurens Ramsay and her husband, David Ramsay, or with Abigail and John Adams. At other times, as with Louisa McCord and her husband, female erudition seems to have been a contributing factor to conjugal discord.

Finally, sometimes it is just a matter of asking that vital question, "but where are the women?" when we approach the world of ideas. It is easy to assume that certain activities for whatever reason proceeded without female intellectual involvement. But exploring in the archives often reveals otherwise, as is magnificently displayed in the richly illustrated new book *The Domestic Architecture of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*.[13] This book documents the influence of Latrobe—the young nation's major architect—on elite American housing during the early decades of the republic. The authors' thorough documentation shows that elite women were essential to Latrobe's success in America, taking a major role in the design process. They hired architects, chose plans, kept workers on schedule, and personally oversaw plastering, woodworking, and wallpapering. In brief, they needed the same kind of knowledge that Thomas Jefferson did in carrying out the design and execution of Monticello. We know that he had over forty books on classical architecture alone in his library. What about these women? How did they acquire

[13] Michael W. Fazio and Patrick A. Snadon, *The Domestic Architecture of Benjamin Henry Latrobe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), see for example 418–20, 681.

this knowledge, and how did they channel their influence in this male-dominated world of designers and craftsmen? Asking "where are the women?"does much more than show where the women are in an intellectual network; it has the potential to reveal how the whole network actually operates.

* * *

So why not call a spade a spade, and claim the label "intellectual history" for what keeps coming up so often as the history of the book, the history of reading, the history of writing, the history of education, or cultural studies? Intellectual history seems like a good description of all this work, one that can potentially unite under one roof in fruitful ways various scholars of women's thoughtful undertakings.

A number of books published in the last twenty years suggest that by whatever name, the intellectual history of early American women is alive and well and living in an increasingly transatlantic context. Over a quarter-century ago, Linda Kerber blew wind in the sails of early American women's intellectual history by connecting women's experience to a political question: what was the place of women (and especially women's learning) in a modern republic?[14] That political connection has generated a large and important body of historiography—represented most influentially in the work of Jan Lewis, Rosemarie Zagarri, Nancy Cott, Mary Beth Norton, and Ruth Bloch, and the ongoing contributions of Kerber herself—that focuses on women's learning and its links to political questions of citizenship and public participation. But there has also been an outpouring of other work in not so explicitly political areas. For the purposes of brevity I have eliminated scholarly articles, and focused only on books in the last twenty years (since 1986). We now have detailed studies of eighteenth-century women's literacy;[15] libraries to which women had access;[16] published diaries,

[14] Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); see also her *Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[15] E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

[16] Kevin J. Hayes, *A Colonial Woman's Bookshelf* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996); Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *A History of the Book in America, Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Louise Stevenson, *The Victorian Homefront: American Thought and Culture, 1860–1880* (Boston: Twayne, 1991); William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780–1835* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee

commonplace books, and letters of highly literate women;[17] biographies of highly educated women;[18] studies in the manuscript culture of the eighteenth century

Press, 1989); and Ronald Zboray, *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[17] A partial list would include *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Elaine Forman Crane (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991); Sarah Kemble Knight, "The Journal of Madam Knight," in Wendy Martin, ed., *Colonial American Travel Narratives* (New York: Penguin, 1994); Margaret Law Callcott, *Mistress of Riversdale: The Plantation Letters of Rosalie Stier Calvert, 1795–1821* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Catherine La Coureye Blecki and Karen A. Wulf, eds., *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); *Only for the Eye of a Friend: The Poems of Annis Boudinot Stockton*, ed. Carla Mulford (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995); Sheila Skemp, *Judith Sargent Murray: A Brief Biography with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 1998); Sharon M. Harris, ed., *Selected Writings of Judith Sargent Murray* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Sharon M. Harris, ed., *American Women Writers to 1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner*, ed. Nina Baym (Schenectady: Union College Press, 1992); *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, ed. David B. Mattern and Holly C. Shulman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2003); Michael O'Brien, ed., *An Evening When Alone: Four Journals of Single Women in the South, 1827–67* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993); Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848–1889* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); *The Power of Her Sympathy: The Autobiography and Journal of Catharine Maria Sedgwick*, ed. Mary Kelley (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), Anne Sinkler Whaley LeClercq, ed., *Between North and South: The Letters of Emily Wharton Sinkler, 1842–1865* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); P. A. M. Taylor, *More Than Common Powers of Perception: The Diary of Elizabeth Rogers Mason Cabot* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); *A Woman's Wit and Whimsy: The 1833 Diary of Anna Cabot Lowell Quincy*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003); Richard C. Lounsbury, ed., *Louisa S. McCord: Poems, Drama, Biography, Letters* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Richard C. Lounsbury, ed., *Louisa S. McCord: Selected Writings* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997).

[18] Joanna Bowen Gillespie, *The Life and Times of Martha Laurens Ramsay, 1759–1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Edith B. Gelles, *Portia: The World of Abigail Adams* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); Anne Ousterhout, *The Most Learned Woman in America: A Life of Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1995); Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life, Volume 1: The Private Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); *Volume 2: The Public Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Gary D. Schmidt, *A Passionate Usefulness: The Life and Literary Labors of Hannah Adams* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); Carolyn Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Bruce A. Ronda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own Terms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Leigh

that was so central to women's life of the mind;[19] studies of literary genres used by women and the first literary professions into which they went;[20] studies of the intellectual opportunities available to black women;[21] and studies of women's higher education.[22] Scholars of early American women's intellectual worlds—especially for the eighteenth century, when women began to participate in the transatlantic dialogue of politeness and sensibility—are working to establish long-distance connections among erudite women.[23] Finally, some scholars are asking how Americans were "colonial" and then "postcolonial."[24] These questions

Fought, *Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 1810–1879* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003).

19 David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

20 On the novel, Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Julia A. Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); on the writing of history, Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790–1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); on the Roman play, Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); on botanical knowledge and collecting, Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), chap. 6; on poetry, Mary Loeffelholz, *From School to Salon: Reading Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); on women as editors, Patricia Okker, *Our Sister Editors: Sarah J. Hale and the Tradition of Nineteenth-Century Women Editors* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

21 Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Shirley Wilson Logan, *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999); Carla L. Peterson, *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830–1880)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

22 Margaret A. Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Christie Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Louise L. Stevenson, *Miss Porter's School: A History in Documents, 1847–1948*, 2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1987); Theodore Sizer *et al.*, *To Ornament Their Minds: Sarah Pierce's Litchfield Academy, 1792–1833* (Litchfield: Litchfield Historical Society, 1993).

23 Heidi Hackel and Catherine Kelly, eds., *The Atlantic Worlds of Women's Reading, 1500–1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming 2007); Kate Davies, *Catharine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren: The Revolutionary Atlantic and the Politics of Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); on reform, see Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830–1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

24 Although they do not look specifically at the case of women in colonial America, see Michael Warner, "What's Colonial about Colonial America?" in Robert Blair St. George,

can be asked specifically about women in British America, both the mainland and the Caribbean. Did educated women of the pre-Revolutionary period believe themselves to be "colonial" in the sense of being occupants of an imperial periphery, where they could feel either a sense of inferiority as unsophisticated rubes or superiority at their remove from metropolitan corruption (or both, as Thomas Jefferson does in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, written and published in the 1780s, during the moment of transition from colony to nation)? How did erudite women facilitate the transition to a postcolonial sense of the United States as a "nation" that itself rapidly became an empire?

Having determined that there is indeed an intellectual history of early American women, we are still left with many more questions and problems. Most knotty is women's comparatively lesser public influence relative to men. The intellectual history of early American women cannot be a stand-alone project, for too much is missing from larger currents of thought because of the reality of women's confinement and undereducation. But the methodological prospects this field offers are rich and promise to be useful to other intellectual historians, those who focus neither on women nor on the early period.

ed., *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 49–70; and Myra Jehlen, "The Literature of Colonization," in *The Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume 1: 1590–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–168. For gender and women in the British empire see Philippa Levine, ed., *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).