

“A Wife and a Mother Has No Business to Be So Well Dressed”

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“A Wife and a Mother Has No Business to Be So Well Dressed”:

Gender, Class, and Dynasty in the Revolutionary Republic

Angelica Carter was a merchant's wife. In the three years she lived in Boston, between 1777 and 1780, she gave birth to two children—Philip and Catherine. She was also a woman of elegant taste, sociable disposition, and universally attested charm. The combination of these facts may seem innocuous enough. Yet Carter found that, in revolutionary New England, expectations about how she should conduct herself sometimes conflicted with her inclinations. One occasion in particular stuck in her memory. “Going down one morning into her husband's office, not much decked out, but in a rather elegant French undress,” she found herself an object of interest to at least one of the room's occupants. “A farmer of the Massachusett's [sic] State, who was there on business, seemed surprised at seeing her, and asked who that young lady was.” When someone told him that the young woman was John Carter's wife, he gave an exclamation loud enough for her to hear. “*A wife and a mother,*” said the farmer, “*truly, has no business to be so well dressed.*”¹

This little interaction is interesting enough in its own right. It has something to tell us about the gendered ideology and social norms that structured the eighteenth-century English-speaking world. It concisely places women's social-reproductive role, as actual or potential wives and mothers, at the heart of gender's meaning and function. It also underscores the way choices about clothing and self-presentation were key sites of contention over gendered standards of behaviour and gendered forms of social judgement. At the same time, the scene in John Carter's office, which was part of the home he shared with his wife, reminds us that the boundaries between public and private space, domestic and social worlds, were far less well-defined or strictly implemented than some contemporary notions about gendered

¹ Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North-America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782* (G.G.J and J. Robinson: London, 1787), vol.1, 155.

propriety were prepared to admit. What Angelica Carter wore, where she wore it, and what her relationship was to the men who saw her wearing it—all these things mattered to the stranger who was in her house to conduct business with her husband. They mattered because, in the farmer's eyes, her appearance and behaviour breached moral expectations. In the context of the revolution, it also had political implications. According to one way of looking at it, the success of the republic could be undermined by such behaviour as hers.²

What makes the story still more interesting is to hear it in the voice of Angelica Carter herself. In the summer of 1780, when a French army under the command of the Comte de Rochambeau arrived at Newport, Rhode Island, John Carter moved quickly to take advantage of the potential business opportunity. By October, he and a partner had secured an exclusive contract to act as commercial agents for Rochambeau's army, and the Carter family took up residence in Newport, where they soon became well-acquainted with some of the most senior officers. Among Angelica Carter's new friends was the celebrated François-Jean, chevalier de Chastellux, a member of the Académie française whose essays on poetry and history marked him as a self-conscious observer of the human condition. It was Chastellux who recorded the story of the Massachusetts farmer and the well-dressed young lady, in the travel memoir he published when he returned to France. There seems no reason to doubt that he heard the anecdote from Carter's own lips. With that in mind, we can reread the scene through a new lens: as a demonstration not just of American patriarchy, but of the cultural distance between ordinary colonists and the cosmopolitan elite to which Carter belonged.³

² Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* 13 (Autumn, 1987); Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75.1 (June 1988); Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, 2011); Kelly Ryan, *Regulating Passion: Sexuality and Patriarchal Rule in Massachusetts, 1700-1830* (New York, 2014).

³ For John Carter's engagement by the French, see Tom Cutterham, "The Revolutionary Transformation of American Merchant Networks: Carter and Wadsworth and their World, 1775-1800," *Enterprise & Society* 18.1 (March 2017).

In addition to being a merchant's wife, and a lively and amiable young woman, Angelica Carter was also the eldest daughter of one of New York's most powerful men, the Albany-based landowner and Continental Army general Philip Schuyler. She had benefited from a domestic education that was, by American standards, unusually refined. She was certainly familiar enough with French to speak with Rochambeau's officers in their own tongue. Moreover, brought up among the high society of late colonial New York, and in an atmosphere of ostentatious wealth—including the ownership of enslaved people—she had few compunctions about flaunting her knowledge of European taste and fashion. When Carter told Chastellux that she had come down that morning in Boston, “not much decked out, but in a rather elegant French undress,” we catch a glimpse of her own wry, confident, mildly self-deprecating tone. As Carter told it, the point of the story was not just the clash of moral standards. It was the amusing fact that even a pious and unsophisticated Massachusetts farmer had been drawn to remark on how well dressed she was.⁴

This essay takes Angelica Carter—whose surname, following her husband's, became Church in 1784—as a case study in the intersection between class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship in the revolutionary American republic. It argues that, for Carter and women like her, family life held a somewhat different set of meanings than those prescribed for women of lower status. Moreover, this distinctive attitude to kinship shaped the norms of sociability that governed an emerging national elite. Like other wealthy, well-connected, white women in the final decades of the eighteenth century, Carter disavowed the ideology of female domesticity and modesty implicit in the farmer's moral judgement. Indeed, the public display of feminine sexuality could be a useful tool in the ongoing process of securing elite power. Just as gentlemen sought to assert their masculinity before peers and the body politic, women of the same class made a show of charm and beauty. Doing so affirmed not only their status but also

⁴ Don Gerlach, *Philip Schuyler and the American Revolution in New York, 1733-1777* (Lincoln, 1964); *idem*, *Proud Patriot: Philip Schuyler and the War of Independence, 1777-1783* (Syracuse, 1987).

their merit, making a case for their elevated role in the republic. For women especially, it was family relationships that underpinned these dynamics. At the root of the early republic's cosmopolitan femininity, in other words, lay the politics of dynasty.⁵

Scholars seeking to understand a broader population of women—generally, white women—in the early republic have rightly emphasised the mechanisms by which substantial numbers could take on the role of citizens and assert their place in the political world. Those included reading and writing for the press, attending and teaching in educational institutions, and participating in the public ceremony of early republican life. Historians have also highlighted the vital role that women played at every level of economic life, from the household and the marketplace to business enterprise and investment. This essay addresses the more restricted field of elite sociability, and the relatively small number of women who moved in the nation's most exclusive circles. It builds on studies of the so-called “republican court” in the United States, as well as scholarship on elite women's role as powerbrokers in British and French society, to draw out the ways that their gendered experience of sexuality and family life interacted with strategies for reproducing and accumulating power. Like all other ruling classes, that of the United States depended upon women. That dependence drove the shifting political salience of gender and sexuality in the early republic.⁶

⁵ I use “dynasty” here in its extended sense, referring to a kinship-group that exercises considerable—but not necessarily sovereign—power, draws at least some of that power from the cultural significance of its own lineage, and attempts to reproduce it across successive generations; see Jeroen Duindam, *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300-1800* (Cambridge, 2015). For the cosmopolitanism of post-revolutionary high society, and its particular association with women and femininity, see Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 2001). I use “cosmopolitan,” as Kate Haulman does, to signify the attitude of sophistication and exclusivity adopted by those who were capable of following European trends in clothing and manners, an attitude neatly encapsulated by Carter's story about her “elegant French undress”; see Haulman, *Politics of Fashion*, p.11.

⁶ On women as citizens, see Rosemarie Zagarri, “Women and Party Conflict in the Early Republic,” in Jeffrey L. Pasley et al., eds., *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2004); Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 2007); Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2007); Lucia McMahon, *Mere Equals: The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, 2012). For women in economic life, see Ellen Hartigan O'Connor, *The Ties that Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia, 2009); Serena Zabin, “Women, Trade, and the Roots of Consumer Societies,” in Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor and Lisa Materson, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of American Women's and Gender History* (Oxford, 2018); Sara Damiano, *To Her Credit: Women,*

Angelica Carter's class status was embedded in the particular context of colonial and Revolutionary New York. A handful of families owned vast swathes of the Hudson Valley throughout the eighteenth century, and between them held the levers of political and social power. These enormously wealthy families were further distinguished from their neighbours and tenants by ethnic and cultural markers. As descendants of the Dutch elite of the colonial New Netherlands, dynasties such as the Van Cortlandts, Van Rensselaers, and Schuylers maintained the Dutch language and Dutch religious institutions through the Revolutionary era. The wealthiest and most prestigious families of British origin, such as the Livingstons, also boasted deep kinship ties with the Dutch elite. All owners of enslaved Black people, these families mobilised whiteness among their other hereditary privileges. Their performances of status were also, of course, deeply gendered. As Jeanne Boydston has put it, referring to colonial elites in general, women were "embodiments of family power, [who] dispensed patronage, nurtured social and economic partnerships, and choreographed the public rituals of the ruling classes." Such a role was hardly unique to New York, but it was all the more marked where "family power" was so deeply entrenched.⁷

Shaped by the habitus of Schuyler- and Van Rensselaer-dominated Albany, the newlywed Angelica Carter entered Boston society in 1777 without having divested herself of

Finance, and the Law in Eighteenth-Century New England Cities (Baltimore, 2021). On the "republican court," see the articles by Fredrika Teute and David Shields, especially "The Republican Court and the Historiography of a Woman's Domain in the Public Sphere," and François Furstenberg and David Waldstreicher, "Re-introducing the Republican Court," in *Journal of the Early Republic*, 35.2 (Summer 2015). On Britain, see the work of Elaine Chalus, especially "'To Serve My Friends': Women and Political Patronage in Eighteenth-Century England," in Amanda Vickery, ed., *Women, Privilege, and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the present* (Stanford, 2001). On France, see Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, 1994); and in contrast to Landes and Goodman, Antoine Lilti, *The World of the Salons: Sociability and Worldliness in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York, 2014).

⁷ Jeanne Boydston, "Making Gender in the Early Republic: Judith Sargent Murray and the Revolution of 1800," in James Horn, Jan Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, & the New Republic* (University of Virginia Press, 2002), 243. For similar conditions in the south, see Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Cornell University Press, 1998), and for slavery's role in New York and New England, see Nicole Saffold Maskiell, *Bound by Bondage: Slavery and the Creation of a Northern Gentry* (Cornell University Press, 2022).

the markers of dynastic privilege. Attending to the social obligations of her rank, she exchanged several visits with Baroness Frederika von Riedesel, who had been captured with her husband and the British army at Saratoga. Charmed by the brief reception the Schuylers had given her in Albany, von Riedesel praised Carter as “gentle and good, like her parents.” At that time, her husband John Carter’s business also depended substantially on the Schuylers’ family connections, especially with Walter Livingston (Angelica Carter’s cousin through his marriage to Philip Schuyler’s niece) and his younger brother Henry. Carter thus remained an embodiment of family power, in spite of her new surname and the distance from the Hudson Valley. Her appearance in the public spaces of her Boston home was, thus, part of her gendered performance of class status—to some a provocation, but to others an attraction in both personal and business relationships.⁸

Like Baroness von Riedesel, the chevalier de Chastellux was certainly aware of Carter’s dynastic status. He dined at the Schuylers’ Albany mansion during his tour of the United States, reporting in his *Travels* that beyond Philip Schuyler’s own fortune, which was “very considerable... his marriage [in 1755] with Miss Rensselaer [sic], the rich heiress of a family which has given its name to a district, or rather a whole province, still added to his credit and his influence.” Yet in his retelling of Angelica Carter’s encounter with the Massachusetts farmer, Chastellux chose to obscure her family and status, for both literary and ideological reasons. These passages in his book play up the contrast between American and French society, emphasising American innocence of the aristocratic decadence that had become the subject of critique in France. Chastellux sought to portray a revolutionary society that possessed the advantages of civilization without the symptoms of corruption or decline,

⁸ Marvin L. Brown, Jr., *Baroness von Riedesel and the American Revolution: Journal and Correspondence of a Tour of Duty, 1776-1783* (University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 70.

and one in which gendered scripts were in some ways reordered. To do that, he had to turn the significance of Carter's story on its head.⁹

For Chastellux, American simplicity and virtue were most strikingly observed in the carefree physical intimacy and sexual openness of its young women—what he called “the extreme liberty that prevails between the two sexes, as long as they are unmarried.” To illustrate the point, he described how eighteen-year-old Cornelia Van Horne, a merchant's daughter, casually held hands and shared food with a male friend in her own home, without “any idea of marriage between them.” Earlier in the *Travels*, he had commented on the “beautiful girl” who waited upon him and his companions at a Connecticut tavern. “She had no objection to be looked at, nor to have her beauty commended, nor even to receive a few caresses,” he wrote, “provided it was done without an air of familiarity or libertinism.” Like other European visitors, including his comrades-in-arms, Chastellux positioned American women as exotic, uncorrupted, and frank rather than sophisticated in their sexuality. What might be judged indecent or debauched in the Old World took on a different cast in the New.¹⁰

These attractive and exotic sexual norms had their counterpart in what Chastellux portrayed as a far deeper and more rigid commitment to the institution of marriage. “It is no crime for a girl to embrace a young man,” he summarised, but “it would be a very heinous one for a married woman even to show a desire of pleasing.” By way of evidence, it was at this point he inserted Angelica Carter's story. For his purposes, its point was that married women who dressed well, as if they aimed to please men other than their husbands, found

⁹ Chastellux, *Travels*, vol.1, 376. On the debate over aristocratic decadence in France, see Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*; John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 2006).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15. Chastellux was not alone in making such comments. For the French army's reception in Newport and their observations of local custom and practice, see T. Cole Jones, “Displaying the Ensigns of Harmony: The French Army in Newport, Rhode Island, 1780-1781,” *New England Quarterly* 85.3 (September 2012), especially 453.

themselves the objects of patriarchal censure. How different, he implied, from the adultery so widely tolerated in France. Describing “Mrs Carter, a handsome young woman,” Chastellux did not mention her illustrious family. Instead, he situated her as the wife of a merchant, with the same middling status as Cornelia Van Horne. Thus disguised, the anecdote could serve its purpose as proof of the New World’s superior moral culture, a chastening mirror on the gendered scripts of the European metropole.¹¹

Carter’s own perspective was evidently quite different. In the first place, the very telling of the story gives the lie to any sense of embarrassment or impropriety she might have felt about her behaviour. If it was wrong to appear in her husband’s office “decked out... in an elegant French undress,” then it was certainly also wrong to brag about it in the company of a French officer who was not her husband. What Carter had to gain from recounting the anecdote was the emphatic announcement of her own sophistication, her familiarity with European fashion, and most of all, the distance between her own moral universe and the rustic backwardness of a simple Massachusetts farmer. The way she sought to represent herself was contradictory to all that Chastellux hoped to convey to the reader of the *Travels*: not an American innocent, but an enlightened cosmopolitan. Just as her appearance in her husband’s office had been a performance of class status, so her account of it for her new French friends was intended to mark her distinction from the rabble.

George Grieve, who had lived in the United States in the early 1780s and translated the *Travels* into English for publication in 1787, clearly grasped the significance of class to Chastellux’s discussion of American sexual norms. His footnotes to the text informed readers that the “freedom” enjoyed by unmarried women “prevails amongst all ranks,” but that it was “particularly striking amongst the middling classes and the common people.” Regarding Angelica Carter, he removed the veil that Chastellux had placed over her class identity by

¹¹ Chastellux, *Travels*, vol.1, 153-154, 154-155.

pointing out that she was “the daughter of General *Schuyler*.” He added that her husband, by 1787 a flourishing merchant and financier known to the world as John Barker Church, was “an English gentleman of very respectable family and connections.” With this information, English-speaking audiences could appreciate the anecdote in terms much closer to those Carter herself had intended: as a comment on the way dynastic politics, “family and connections,” shaped contrasting attitudes to sex and gender.¹²

Although few of her own words from this period survive, what we know about Carter’s lifestyle in the early 1780s confirms the impression she conveyed through the brief anecdote in Chastellux’s book. By all accounts, she was quite familiar with the art of dressing and acting in ways that pleased men. In the winter of early 1780, for example, a few months after she gave birth to her daughter Catherine, she joined her two oldest sisters in a season of balls, dinners, and sleigh-rides at the Continental Army’s winter headquarters in Morristown, New Jersey. The three women became “the dayly toasts of our table” among certain American and British officers that March. In the summer of 1782, the former staff officer James McHenry told his friend Alexander Hamilton what he and his comrades already knew: “Mrs Carter is a fine woman. She charms in all companies. No one has seen her, of either sex, who has not been pleased with her, and she has pleased every one.” Needless to say, nobody in this milieu considered her behaviour at all improper.¹³

Contrary to what Chastellux implied, the risks of flirtation and public sexuality were greater for unmarried women than they were for those, like Carter, who were already in possession of a husband. Novels of the late eighteenth century, which reflected the popular anxieties and fantasies of their readership, were replete with narratives of seduction, warnings of the moral and material destitution that could befall a woman who allowed her innocence to

¹² *Ibid.*, 154. See Thomas R. Knox, “Greive [formerly Grieve], George,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (September 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11578>

¹³ Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, 17 March 1780; James McHenry to Alexander Hamilton, 11 August 1782; Alexander Hamilton Papers, *Founders Online*.

be corrupted. The figure of the coquette, which once primarily signified female empowerment in the process of courtship, had by the 1780s come to evoke tragic hubris, the folly of a woman seeking pleasure or power by resisting the subordination of marriage. All women, of whatever race or class, had to negotiate a shifting and uncertain set of boundaries around their behaviour, and all faced the sexual double standard that gave men license where women were condemned. But, secure in her marriage, her racial privilege, and her class status, Carter was well-positioned to charm her way through revolutionary high society. In the right circumstances, flirtation was an available form of social interaction, and sexuality could be a source of power.¹⁴

Nevertheless, Carter's anecdote captures a conflict that had emerged in the revolutionary era and would only intensify in the early republic. The rebuke she encountered represents that strand of revolutionary thought which saw in asceticism a mark of virtue, and in luxury both a cause and a symptom of moral corruption. Samuel Adams was far from alone in his belief that the surest way to undermine a people's virtue was to make them "extravagant, luxurious, [and] effeminate." Such thinking played well to an audience of workers, tenants, and middling sorts, because it turned what might be a deficiency into a sign of moral superiority. It made men like our Massachusetts farmer heroes of the political drama of revolution, giving them the confidence to speak out against the dissolute wealthy. In this context, gender was deeply entangled with struggles over revolutionary political economy and class relations in the new republic. The nature, scope, and structure of family life were

¹⁴ Cathy Davidson, "The Novel as Subversive Activity: Women Reading, Women Writing," in Alfred Young, ed., *Beyond the American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, 1993); Ruth Bloch, "Changing Conceptions of Sexuality and Romance in Eighteenth-Century America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 60.1 (Jan. 2003); Theresa Braunschneider, *Our Coquettes: Capacious Desire in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, 2009). For a consideration of sexual violence and threat across the spectrum of class and race in this period, see Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (Chapel Hill, 2006).

central to these problems. On each side of the argument were different ideas about what it meant to be “a wife and a mother.”¹⁵

The dynastic family structure that shaped Angelica Carter’s life, including her experience of gender and sexuality, was sharply at odds with the domestic ideal that increasingly dominated gender ideology in the early republic. Crucially, the dynamics and politics of dynasty worked to continually erode the boundaries of family and domestic life—the very boundaries that middle-class gender discourse was so keen to reinforce. Unlike the enclosed and independent household unit imagined by the proponents of normative domesticity, dynastic families were oriented outward from the household, toward the extended networks of kinship, patronage, and influence on which the continuation of their status, wealth, and power depended. Of course, people of all classes and races were embedded in extended kinship networks; few if any households actually conformed to the emerging ideal type. Yet the public visibility of powerful, dynastic families served to highlight their divergence from domestic norms, making them useful foils against which the proper boundaries of family life could be defined. Their privilege marked them out, shaping the character, lifestyle, and ambitions of those who belonged to them. Dynasty, for members of these families, structured their outlook on the world.¹⁶

¹⁵ Samuel Adams to John Scollay, 30 December 1780, in Harry Alonzo Cushing, ed., *Writings of Samuel Adams* (4 vols., New York, 1904-1908), IV, 236-238. See Haulman, *Politics of Fashion*, 1-2. For a comparable example of clashing gender and class expectations, see Stephnie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, 1995), 128.

¹⁶ For useful discussions of the historiography of family structure in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic world, see Karin Wulf, “Women and Families in Early (North) America and the Wider (Atlantic) World,” *History Compass* 8.3 (2010); Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012), 1-13; Julie Hardwick, Sarah Pearsall, and Karin Wulf, “Introduction: Centering Families in Atlantic Histories,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 70.2 (April 2013). Work that emphasises the significance of kinship among early American elites includes Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds Among the Early South Carolina Gentry* (Baltimore, 2000); Sarah Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (New York, 2008); and Alisa Wade, “An Alliance of Ladies: Power, Public Affairs, and Class Construction in Early National New York City” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2016).

One factor that distinguished Carter's family life from those of most white women in the early republic was the smaller amount of time and energy she had to dedicate to her own children and her husband. Physical domestic labour was for the most part delegated to servants, paid or enslaved. A good deal of the work of childcare, both physical and emotional, could also be passed on to others: nannies, governesses, tutors, and residential schools. As a result, it was perfectly possible for Carter to spend long periods away from her children altogether. Being the mother of two infants did not keep her from the social life of Boston, Morristown, or Newport. In 1782, when she had recently arrived in Williamsburg, a business associate promised that his wife would "endeavour to provide her with a good Woman to take care of her Children." Husbands, similarly, could be left to the care of others. In 1789, for example, Carter—now Church—left her children and their father at home in England while she spent nine months visiting New York.¹⁷

None of this, however, meant that Church lacked a sense of duty or attachment to her family. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The difference lay in her more expansive sense of what her family was, and what she could do on its behalf. Whatever name she took, she was keenly aware of herself as part of a political and genealogical organism that was worth more than the sum of its parts. This organism, the extended Schuyler family, possessed a coherence and a logic that did not depend on any individual, and which exerted pressure on the minds of its constituent members. The success of the family, its reputation, wealth, and influence, were motivations that carried great weight with Church, just as they did with her parents and siblings, her aunts, uncles, and cousins. For her, being a wife and a mother extended rather than displaced this logic. Becoming a Carter or a Church did not

¹⁷ Chaloner & White to Wadsworth & Carter, 1 March 1782, Chaloner & White Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Angelica Church to Elizabeth Hamilton, 30 January 1789, Philip Church Papers, New York Historical Society.

make her any less of a Schuyler. Rather, it gave her a new platform from which to keep acting on the family's behalf.

While she lived in England, Church paid particular attention to the career of her brother-in-law, Alexander Hamilton. At least in epistolary terms, their friendship was at its highpoint in the five years after she returned from her 1789 trip to New York, a period that coincided with his time in George Washington's cabinet. She took pleasure in reminding him of his importance, even while she treated it mockingly. She was, as she told him, "extremely anxious for your success," and as she told her sister, "so proud of his merit and abilities, that even you Eliza might envy my feelings." Her eyes sparkled, she claimed, when she spoke of Hamilton as her brother, "thus you see my dear Eliza that your Husband's fame very much improves your sister's looks." As Hamilton's political power grew to eclipse that of the Schuyler patriarch, members of the dynasty increasingly looked to him for leadership and approval. His influence and patronage, especially his central role in the financial architecture of the federal republic, was an important factor in the Schuylers' continued prominence.¹⁸

Church's flirtatious relationship with Alexander Hamilton also serves to emphasise the role that sexuality played in her heterosocial behaviour. As Cassandra Good has emphasised, there is no reason to think that the pair pursued an adulterous relationship. For one thing, his wife Elizabeth Hamilton was clearly included in the friendship. When Angelica Church wrote to one, she generally seems to have assumed the other was also reading. In any case, sex itself was not the point of the way Church performed feminine sexuality. Through the way she dressed, acted, spoke, and wrote, she worked artfully to win over the powerful men with whom she came into contact. As James McHenry had put it, "she charms in all companies." It was precisely this kind of performance, from a married woman and a mother,

¹⁸ Angelica Church to Alexander Hamilton, [February 1790], Hamilton Papers, *Founders Online*; Angelica Church to Elizabeth Hamilton, 25 April 1792; Angelica Church to Elizabeth Hamilton, 25 January 1794; Hamilton Papers, Library of Congress.

that had raised the rebuke of the farmer back in Boston—but he had not been its intended audience. While there was risk in wielding sexuality to garner influence and favour, it was a vital part of Church’s social repertoire. Her relationship with Alexander Hamilton was, in dynastic terms, just as important as the one with her own husband.¹⁹

Inevitably, the brothers-in-law found themselves closely engaged in one another’s business and financial affairs, just as they were with one another’s family. In 1784, the year Church’s husband finally secured the proceeds from his enormously lucrative contract with the French crown, he and his business partner Jeremiah Wadsworth were working with Hamilton to establish a banking enterprise in which to place their capital. The outcome was that John Church became a major shareholder in the Bank of New York, of which Hamilton was a founding director. While the Churches lived in England, Hamilton oversaw their interests in America, including investments in undeveloped western land. Between them, the Churches and the Hamiltons combined enormous wealth with unrivalled political access, but it was the Schuyler connection that brought them together. Both men certainly recognised and acted upon a shared family interest, without much need for any special pleading from their wives. Their marriages created a kinship relation with each other, and with the family as a whole, which played a significant organising role in each man’s life.²⁰

There were, of course, limits to Hamilton’s influence, and to his sister-in-law’s influence over him. When the post of ambassador to Great Britain became vacant, Church expected Hamilton to help procure the role for her father, Philip Schuyler. Hamilton, however, warned that it was “very uncertain” whether she would get her wish. “Our

¹⁹ Cassandra A. Good, *Founding Friendships: Friendships Between Men and Women in the Early American Republic* (Oxford, 2015), 2; Good, “The flirtatious friendship of Alexander Hamilton and Angelica Church hits Broadway,” OUPblog, November 2015, <https://blog.oup.com/2015/11/friendship-alexander-hamilton-angelica-church-broadway/>

²⁰ John Barker Church to Alexander Hamilton, 7 February, 2 May 1784, *Founders Online*; Alexander Hamilton to John Barker Church, 10 March 1784, *Founders Online*; Alexander Hamilton to James McHenry, 28 July 1798, *Founders Online*.

republican ideas,” he told her, “stand much in the way of accumulating offices in one family.” It was a warning that her ideas about the entitlements of dynasty were not shared by most Americans. Indeed, they were politically suspect. But Church persisted, if only half-heartedly. “Tell Hamilton,” she wrote to her sister a year later, “if he does not send my Father ambassador, that I shall believe he has no influence at Court, and that I will try not to care for him.” By then, it was too late. Thomas Pinckney was appointed to the role later that month, a choice which gave the lie to Hamilton’s protestations about republican values. The Pinckneys of South Carolina boasted a greater concentration of high offices between them than even the Schuylers did.²¹

Indeed, the Schuylers were hardly unique in the dynastic scope and structure of their family life. In New York, the Livingstons boasted more branches and more extensive connections in the state. Catherine Livingston, daughter of New Jersey Governor William Livingston, was among of the circle of young women who caroused with army officers at Morristown in 1780; her sister Sarah was by then already married to the diplomat John Jay. In the south, highly concentrated property ownership among tidewater planters had long supported the formation of dynasties, from the Carters and Randolphs of Virginia to the Rutledges and Pinckneys of South Carolina. Yet powerful extended families existed all over the United States, deriving their wealth and status not only from the ownership of land and slaves but also from commercial enterprise and political office. As Fredrika Teute and David Shields have noted, facilitating “dynastic marriage” between politicians, leading merchants, and “landed families” might have been the “most important business” of the Continental

²¹ Alexander Hamilton to Angelica Church, 31 January 1791, *Founders Online*.; Angelica Church to Elizabeth Hamilton, 3 January 1792, Alexander Hamilton Papers: Family Papers, Library of Congress. For the Pinckneys, see Frances Leigh Williams, *A Founding Family: The Pinckneys of South Carolina* (New York, 1978); Lorri Glover, *Eliza Lucas Pinckney: An Independent Woman in the Age of Revolution* (New Haven, 2020).

Congress in the 1780s, helping knit together the new nation's elites before the creation of the federal government.²²

On the other hand, not every individual experienced the logic of dynasty in the same way. The contingent patterns of births, marriages, and deaths created an endless series of unique dynamics within and between families. Among Philip Schuyler's three eldest daughters, for example, their ties to his dynastic authority remained unusually strong even after marriage. That was because none of the three women's husbands were closely connected to competing centres of dynastic power. When Angelica Schuyler eloped with the Englishman John Carter in 1777, her parents were "unacquainted with his family connections and situation in life." In fact, his father had died not long after he was born, leaving him to be raised in the household of his uncle. The Schuylers quickly reconciled themselves to the marriage, but it was more than six years before the couple saw or corresponded with John's family. Similarly, Alexander Hamilton, long estranged from his father, brought no family connections to his marriage to Elizabeth Schuyler. For her part, Margaret Schuyler (known as Peggy), married Stephen Van Rensselaer, whose father had died fourteen years earlier, leaving the family without a patriarch of its own.²³

Although each of these marriages was different, all of them had the effect of allowing Philip Schuyler's daughters to maintain their dynastic allegiance to their father. The rules of coverture gave husbands near-total control of their wives' assets and persons, enforcing formal patriarchal domination within the household. Yet dynastic ties structured relationships beyond individual domestic units. Especially in the cases of John Carter and Alexander

²² David Shields and Fredrike Teute, "The Confederation Court," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35.2 (Summer 2015), 221; Alexander Hamilton to Catherine Livingston and Elizabeth Schuyler, [January-February 1780], *Founders Online*. On the Livingstons, see Clare Brandt, *An American Aristocracy: The Livingstons* (Doubleday, 1986); Cynthia Kierner, *Traders and Gentlemen: The Livingstons of New York, 1675-1790* (Cornell University Press, 1992). For the south, see Glover, *All Our Relations*; Kierner, *Beyond the Household*; and Daniel Kilbride, *An American Aristocracy: Southern Planters in Antebellum Philadelphia* (Columbia, 2006).

²³ Philip Schuyler to William Duer, 3 July 1777, in Benson Lossing, *The Life and Times of Philip Schuyler*, vol. 2 (Sheldon & Company, 1873), 206-207; William B. Fink, "Stephen Van Rensselaer: The Last Patroon," (PhD. diss., Columbia University, 1950), 6.

Hamilton, each new son-in-law quickly became enmeshed in the Schuyler family's commercial and political networks, as well as in its emotional life. Both the Carters and the Hamiltons named their firstborn sons Philip—a further signal that their families functioned primarily to extend rather than disrupt the Schuyler dynasty. By contrast, for example, the first child born to John Jay and his wife Sarah (née Livingston) was named Peter after John's father, not William after Sarah's. Philip Schuyler's continued role as dynastic patriarch shaped his daughters' attitudes to their husbands and children. Rather than forming the centre of their members' worlds, individual households were nodes in a larger dynastic organism. Interest and affection were not focused inwards to the home but dispersed more widely among an extended network of kinship, reciprocity, and patronage.²⁴

Such attitudes depended, in certain crucial ways, on wealth and privilege. Wealth bought women like Angelica Carter the service of others—including those they kept in slavery—and that gave them more time to spend on sociability. It also made them mobile, capable of paying frequent visits to each other and to friends, of attending social events such as balls, salons, and dinners. Those activities were both a form of pleasure and of politics, for they helped maintain the web of connections on which the family's status largely rested. It was no coincidence that Peggy Van Rensselaer, the only sister who had married into a large landed fortune, was also the most sedentary: "Must she always be within the sound of the Dutch bell?" Angelica Church once wondered in a letter to Elizabeth Hamilton. In performing this role, where pleasure was not to be disentangled from interest or power, the freedom to please and charm men was essential. Being "well dressed," a process which itself

²⁴ On the persistence of coverture and its negotiation in the new republic, see Linda Kerber, "The Paradox of Women's Citizenship in the Early Republic: The Case of Martin vs. Massachusetts, 1805," *American Historical Review* 97.2 (Apr. 1992).

demanded time, money, and domestic labour, was integral to this pursuit. Cosmopolitan femininity emerged from the impulses and affordances of dynasty.²⁵

In the 1790s, two related factors contributed to making dynastic politics—especially as exercised by and through women—a matter of widespread public controversy. On one hand, the emergence and intensification of partisan divisions helped to rapidly erode surviving attitudes of deference toward the republican political class. On the other, the growth and diversification of the press, driven in part by partisan contestation, made it easier than ever before not only to learn about the lives of the wealthy and powerful but to publicly express opinions on them. A critique of aristocratic manners inspired by the events and rhetoric of the French Revolution infused American political discourse. Just as in France, moreover, gender and sexuality among the elite provided useful terrain on which to slide between political opposition, salacious gossip, and moral condemnation. The 1790s were an age of network- and institution-building, in which dynastic alliances, heretosociability, and female influence played crucial roles. They were also an age of scandal, in which those very dynamics were exposed to intensifying scrutiny.²⁶

Anne Bingham, who led Philadelphia's high society during this period, was as much a creature of dynasty as her friend Angelica Church. Both her grandfather and her father had been mayors of Philadelphia as well as prosperous merchants. Her father, Thomas Willing, had gone into business with Robert Morris during the Seven Years' War and helped him

²⁵ Angelica Church to Elizabeth Hamilton, 11 December 1794; New York Historical Society, Philip Church Papers.

²⁶ For the decline of deference, see James Rogers Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven, 1993); Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, 2001). For the press, see Jeffrey Pasley, "*The Tyranny of Printers*": *Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, 2002); and Daniel Marcus, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York, 2009). For the gendered and sexualized tone of the critique of aristocracy in France, see the essays in Lynn Hunt, ed., *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore, 1991); and for debate in England, see Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s: Pamphlets, Polemics and Political Ideas* (Woodbridge, 2005); and Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton, 2006).

found the Bank of North America in 1781. One aunt, Elizabeth, married the scion of another merchant family, Samuel Powel, who was himself elected mayor of Philadelphia in 1775.

Another, Mary, married the Virginia planter William Byrd. Anne's husband, William Bingham, was a business associate of her father and Robert Morris, with interests in banking and land as well as commerce. Their marriage, in October 1780, thus helped to solidify alliances among the city's merchant princes. "They have set out in highest style," one observer remarked; "nobody here will be able to make the figure they do." Wealth and dynastic status created the conditions for Anne Bingham to shine as a famous beauty and a wit, the city's foremost *salonnière* and social gatekeeper.²⁷

Social occasions at the Binghams' extravagant townhouse, as well as those of her aunt and next-door neighbour Elizabeth Powel and the drawing room gatherings of the presidents' wives Martha Washington and Abigail Adams, served several important functions in early national political life. They mollified the tensions between political rivals by bringing them together in a context of polite sociability, reminding them of their shared status and privilege. They also created venues where patronage, mutual support, and potential marriages could be negotiated. As many scholars have observed, such events placed women like Anne Bingham at the centre of the political stage, blurring the boundaries of the domestic and public spheres. They helped to regulate the manners of the new republic's elite and its upwardly mobile middle class. Salon receptions and balls provided opportunities to demonstrate one's sensibility and cosmopolitan sophistication. Even French émigrés were impressed by the "elegance" of Philadelphia ladies, "magnificently adorned with European cloth." The same gentleman noted that "these ladies had too many other ways of pleasing" to be overly concerned with how they dressed. Married or not, those who emulated Bingham sought to be

²⁷ Quoted in Robert C. Alberts, *The Golden Voyage: The Life and Times of William Bingham, 1752-1804* (New York, 1969). On Bingham and her salon, see also Margaret L. Brown, "Mr and Mrs William Bingham of Philadelphia: Rulers of the Republican Court," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 61.4 (Oct. 1937); Branson, *Fiery Frenchified Dames*, 125-142.

found charming in mixed company, deploying sexuality as well as intellect and status to wield influence and build useful relationships.²⁸

Towards the end of the decade, both Angelica Church and Anne Bingham began to look for advantageous marriage opportunities for their own children. Bingham's only son was born in 1800, but her daughters, Ann Louisa and Maria Matilda, turned sixteen—the age at which their mother had married—in 1798 and 1799 respectively, while Church's eldest son, Philip, was eighteen in 1796 and her second son, John, turned eighteen in 1799. With American enthusiasm for the French Revolutionary project waning, and John Adams elected to the presidency, Federalists were in the ascendant in these years in both New York and Pennsylvania. Philip Schuyler, having been displaced by Aaron Burr from his seat in the senate in 1791, returned to it in 1797, while William Bingham, Anne's husband, entered the senate himself in 1795. During Alexander Hamilton's time at the Treasury, Thomas Willing had become the president of the First Bank of the United States. Both dynasties were at the centre of political and financial power in the new republic. Inevitably, they sought ways to entrench that power for the coming generation.²⁹

What some people called the Quasi-War, when diplomatic tensions with France led to fighting at sea and a rapid expansion of the standing army, increased the opportunities for profit and patronage available to well-connected families like the Churches and the Binghams. Installed as Inspector General of the Army, Alexander Hamilton lost no time in having his nephew Philip Church appointed to his staff at the rank of captain. Along with the divisive Alien and Sedition Acts, the Quasi-War also further intensified partisan conflict.

²⁸ [Bon-Albert Briois de Beaumetz] to Angelica Schuyler Church, 6 May 1794, Angelica Schuyler Church Papers, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia (author's translation, with thanks to Sam Ferguson for transcription). For elite sociability in Philadelphia, see Teute and Shields, "Republican Court," and *idem*, "The Court of Abigail Adams," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35.2 (Summer 2015); Branson, *Fiery Frenchified Dames*.

²⁹ For Federalist resurgence in the summer of 1798, see Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (Oxford, 1993), 581.

Democratic Republicans were keenly aware of the dynastic relationships that underpinned the Federalist establishment. By exposing them, opponents made political capital out of the charge of aristocracy. In the spring of 1799, a correspondent to the *New London Bee* sketched the connections between the Schuylers, Hamiltons, and Churches, noting that John Church had made a “great fortune” in the War of Independence. Now, “the son of Mr. C. is about to marry the daughter of Mr. Bingham of Philadelphia, the federal Senator. Thus are our advocates for war cemented together.” Expanding the army, the article concluded, would impoverish ordinary Americans while further enriching this new national elite.³⁰

This critique of aristocracy played on the contrast between instrumental, dynastic marriage and the companionate marriage ideal that had emerged among the eighteenth-century middle class. A proper republican marriage was supposed to be a loving and domestic union, in which wives nurtured the virtue of their husbands and children. Outside such marriages, on the other hand, both women and men became vulnerable to vice and corruption. The *New London Bee*’s correspondent did not have to look far for evidence to support this implication: two years earlier, Alexander Hamilton had been embroiled in scandal, having publicly admitted an adulterous affair that took place earlier in the decade. “Are our young officers and soldiers to learn virtue of general Hamilton?,” the article asked. “Or like their general are they to be found in the bed of adultery?” Scholars have shown how the Hamilton-Reynolds Affair helped crystallize a gendered “politics of character” that opened elite gentlemen to new kinds of popular moral scrutiny. But the virtue (or otherwise) of individual men was embedded in a context of class status and family life. It was the politics of dynasty, Democratic Republicans implied, that gave root to corruption.³¹

³⁰ *New London Bee*, 14 April 1799, reprinted in the *Aurora General Advertiser*, 13 May 1799. For the appointment of Philip Church, see Alexander Hamilton to James McHenry, 28 July 1798, *Founders Online*. Hamilton also recommended the promotion of Rensselaer Schuyler, his brother-in-law; Alexander Hamilton to James McHenry, 21 August 1798. Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 714-719.

³¹ *New London Bee*, 14 April 1799, reprinted in the *Aurora General Advertiser*, 13 May 1799. On the Hamilton-Reynolds Affair, see Jacob Katz Cogan, “The Reynolds Affair and the Politics of Character,” *Journal of the*

Neither of Anne Bingham's daughters in fact married Philip Church or his brother John. The whiff of scandal that still hung over the Schuyler dynasty in those years might have played a part in that, but there were also other factors. Both the Binghams and the Churches, after all, had ambitions on a transatlantic scale. In August 1798, Ann Louisa Bingham married the English financier Alexander Baring, who had spent the last two years in the family's company negotiating the purchase of a tract of land in Maine. Himself the scion of a mercantile dynasty, the twenty-three-year-old Baring was a more eligible match even than Captain Church. As well as the Maine land, his business in the United States included financing the purchase of muskets and cannon for Alexander Hamilton's expanded army. Further solidifying the Binghams' network of influence and patronage, Baring underwrote loans to the Federalist grandee Henry Knox, and entered a new partnership with his father-in-law Thomas Willing, trading to to the Río de la Plata. In 1799, when the couple's first child was born, they named him William Bingham Baring.³²

It was Ann Louisa Baring's younger sister Maria who was free to marry Philip Church in 1799, and was the subject of the rumour spread in the *New London Bee*. At the very moment those speculations were being set in print, however, Maria Bingham was preempting such a possibility and catalyzing a new sexual scandal by eloping with a French émigré more than twice her age, Jacques-Pierre Alexandre, comte de Tilly. Along with his countryman, Louis-Marie Antoine, vicomte de Noailles, Tilly had accompanied the Binghams and Alexander Baring on a tour of the Maine lands two years before. Noailles, who had been recommended to Philadelphia society by Angelica Church, was by then a very close friend of the family. Yet the Binghams did not approve of Tilly's friendship with their

Early Republic 16.3 (Autumn, 1996). On republican marriage, see Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28.2 (Summer 1976); Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44.4 (Oct., 1987).

³² Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 277, 323, 346-348, 363-364. See John Orbell, "Baring, Alexander, first Baron Ashburton," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/1380>

fifteen-year-old daughter. When they discovered the elopement, a search-party led by Alexander Baring returned her by force to the Bingham home. The incident quickly became public knowledge. When it reprinted the *Bee*'s article soon afterwards, the *Philadelphia Aurora* made a pointed amendment: "the son of Mr. C is [was] about to marry the daughter of Mr. Bingham."³³

Maria Bingham's elopement, which so neatly fit the novelistic trope of a naive and wealthy woman seduced by a worldly schemer, was treated by many in high society as a warning of the dangers of "unbounded prosperity and dissipation." In the context of the Quasi-War, they also linked it to the Bingham's taste for French customs and fashion. Even Angelica Church, whose own marriage was the product of a more successful elopement, was scornful in private. "Madame de Tilly is quite *a la française*, rouge and short petticoats," she wrote from Philadelphia. "Poor young creature she has been the victim to a negligent education." Such comments reflected the sense, captured in the work of Judith Sargent Murray among others, that a proper education would help women to protect their sexual virtue. Evidently, Church believed her own children were better equipped to cope with such challenges. In the same letter, she fretted disingenuously that her daughter Catharine's dancing had been "too much praised," so that she risked giving "more disappointment than pleasure" at the ball she would attend that night.³⁴

Whatever they said about each other privately, though, members of the nation's ruling class understood that sexual scandal was a political weapon wielded not so much against individuals as against the dynastic structure of elite society itself. "Merit, virtue, and talents must have enemies," Church told her sister Elizabeth Hamilton in the wake of the Hamilton-

³³ *Aurora General Advertiser*, 13 May 1799, square brackets in the original. Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 284-289, 369-371; François Furstenburg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (New York, 2014), 282.

³⁴ Justice James Iredell, quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 372; Angelica Church to Elizabeth Hamilton [1799], quoted in Allan McLane Hamilton, *The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton* (New York, 1910), 58. Boydston, "Making Gender in the Early Republic," 256.

Reynolds Affair in 1797. “All this you would not have suffered if you had married into a family less *near the sun*.” Alexander Hamilton’s status, not only as a man but as part of a family, made him the target of gossip and slander, just as family wealth made young women like Maria Bingham vulnerable to calculated seduction. Yet Church did not counsel a retreat into domestic isolation, a recourse that Alexander Hamilton himself sometimes invoked. Instead, she insisted in her characteristically ironic way that the privileges of dynastic status—“the pride, the pleasure, the nameless satisfactions, &c.”—were worth the cost. Some two decades on, she showed the same spirit of implacable hauteur as she had done when confronted with the censure of a Massachusetts farmer.³⁵

For their part, Democratic Republicans continued to make the critique of aristocracy, and the sexual corruption of the Federalist elite, a central feature of their campaign during the election year of 1800. That September, fresh from a three-month prison sentence having been convicted under the Sedition Act, the editor of the *New London Bee* provocatively reprinted the passage about the Schuylers, Churches, and Bingham from the offending 1799 article. He joined it with a passage from Plutarch’s life of Julius Caesar: “Caesar, that he might still more firmly secure to himself the interest of Pompey, gave to him his daughter Julia in marriage, who had before been contracted to Servilius Caepis, and told Servilius he should have Pompey’s daughter...” The conclusion, that dynastic politics corrupted both the institution of marriage and the republic itself, the *Bee* left its readers to draw. It did, though, go on to quote Cato’s protest, “that it was intolerable that the government should be prostituted by marriages, and that these men should advance one another... by the interest of women.” Patriarchy was thus mobilised in the name of republican equality and virtue.³⁶

³⁵ Angelica Church to Elizabeth Hamilton [1797], Schuyler Family Papers, New York State Archives, Albany; quoted in Broadus Mitchell, *Alexander Hamilton: The National Adventure, 1788-1804* (New York, 1962), 418.

³⁶ *New London Bee*, 3 September 1800. For the prosecution of the editor, Charles Holt, see James Morton Smith, “The Political Suppression of Seditious Criticism: A Connecticut Case Study,” *The Historian* 18.1 (1955); Pasley, *Tyranny of Printers*, 132-152.

The changing ideology of gender and sexuality in the first decades of the new republic created a growing rift between the demands of dynastic politics and those of womanhood as such—that is, republican womanhood. Like the freewheeling “sentimental gallants” identified by Sarah Knott, who took up the emancipatory potential of a revolutionary age to practice forms of sexual freedom beyond marriage, female dynasts in the United States wielded sexuality in ways that were not condoned by emerging middle-class norms. Their experience and thus their understanding of family life differed from those of women who lacked elite status. While domestic and companionate ideals had grown increasingly central to republican conceptions of womanhood, the impulses of dynasty blurred boundaries between households just as salons, balls, and drawing-room receptions blurred the boundaries between public and domestic space. Clare Lyons has shown how the post-revolutionary “reconstruction” of gender ideology was “accomplished by inscribing sexual deviance onto women of the lower classes and women of color.” The era’s sexual scandals show how the charge was also levelled at the opposite end of the social hierarchy, to bolster a middle-class and Democratic Republican moral hegemony.³⁷

By the end of the year 1800, the political fortunes of Federalist women like Angelica Church and Anne Bingham had suffered a serious reversal. Their response was a partial, tactical withdrawal from the public sphere into a more secluded realm of high society, no longer tangibly connected to the power and patronage of the federal government. Although middle-class and wealthy women continued to lead charitable, educational, religious and reforming enterprises, there was less talk of “female politicians.” In the south, Cynthia Kierner writes, the “decline of balls and other genteel social rituals” mirrored the reduced

³⁷ Sarah Knott, “Female Liberty? Sentimental Gallantry, Republican Womanhood, and Rights Feminism in the Age of Revolutions,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 71.3 (July 2014), 428; Clare Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, 1730-1830* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 4.

circumstances of plantation dynasties such as the Randolphs, and the narrowing of elite women's social influence. "The era of democratization for men... produced a narrowing of political possibilities for women," Rosemarie Zagarri has argued, transforming a social hierarchy based on class and property distinctions into one rooted in race and gender. Over the last two decades, this narrative of "revolutionary backlash" has become a central tenet of historical consensus about the character of social and political life in the early republic.³⁸

Revisiting the politics of dynasty in the late eighteenth century, however, suggests a variation of perspective on the first half of the nineteenth. Angelica Church exercised considerable power in the revolutionary republic and the new nation: her choices helped shape crucial economic and political networks, upon which depended the supply of wartime armies and the financing of the new federal government. But that power was a product of her dynastic status, embedded in the context of the patriarchal family. Unlike Zagarri's female politicians, Church never sought to act as an "independent political being," as republican conceptions of citizenship demanded. On the contrary, dynastic power relied on interdependence both within and among kinship groups. Wielded through personal relationships, it opened the door to the political deployment of feminine sexuality. Such dynamics, as Catherine Allgor and others have shown, did not disappear with Thomas Jefferson's accession to the presidency. Rather, they remained a crucial element in social, economic, and political life throughout the early republic—even if, in Cassandra Good's words, they tended to be "cloaked... from public view." Public discourse may have been transformed; actual behaviour, in this respect, not so much.³⁹

³⁸ Cynthia Kierner, "Gender and the Decline of the Gentry in Postrevolutionary Virginia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20.2 (Summer 2000), 204; Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 2.

³⁹ Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 47; Good, *Founding Friendships*, 186. Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville, 2000); *idem*, "Believing the Ladies Had Great Influence: Early National American Women's Patronage in Transatlantic Context," *American Political Thought* 4.1 (Winter 2015); Branson, *Fiery Frenchified Dames*. For interdependence as opposed to the ideal of personal independence among the new republic's elite, see Tom Cutterham, *Gentlemen Revolutionaries: Power and Justice in the New American Republic* (Princeton, 2017), 2-3.

What needs to be reassessed here is less the transformation of hegemonic gender ideology, which has been the subject of so much important work, than the salience of class and its continuing relevance in the early republic. Zagarri's analysis, like that of Jeanne Boydston, is right to trace much of the struggle over gender and the household to the class conflict within the new republic that emerged during the revolution. "Democratization" should have meant an end to dynastic privilege, and the concentration of wealth that made it possible, for men and women alike. Yet the claim that gender and race displaced the organising function of class in the early nineteenth century gives too much credit to the triumphalism of the Democratic Republicans and their Revolution of 1800. If white men gained in civil and political status during the period, economic inequality among them did not abate. In moments of hardship, they continued to decry the "monied aristocracy" that accumulated wealth on the backs of other men's and women's labour. As such language indicates, dynastic strategies continued to be vital to the reproduction of wealth and political influence.⁴⁰

Half a century after the Marquis de Chastellux published his reflections on American women's sexuality, an implicit commentary on the corrupt mores of the French nobility, Alexis de Tocqueville produced a similar statement of American exceptionalism. *Democracy in America* allowed French readers to compare what Tocqueville saw as the more mature egalitarian society of the United States with the fragile social compact under Louis Philippe I and, more sharply, with the *ancien régime* itself. In his depiction, the early republic was not only a classless society but also one in which "the inexorable opinion of the public carefully

⁴⁰ Daniel Mandell, *The Lost Tradition of Economic Equality in America, 1600-1870* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 136. Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*; Boydston, "Making Gender"; Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford University Press, 1990). On early nineteenth century inequality, see Cathy Matson, "A House of Many Mansions: Some Thoughts on the Field of Economic History," in Matson, ed., *The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 50; for a chronologically broader and more detailed account, see Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power Before the Civil War* (D.C. Heath and Company, 1973).

circumscribes woman within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties and forbids her to step beyond it.” These two features were not, of course, unrelated. “In America,” he wrote, “the family, in the Roman and aristocratic signification of the word, does not exist.” In other words, the absence of dynasty explained both white men’s equality and women’s domesticity. Like Chastellux, Tocqueville had literary and ideological motives for portraying a coherent and distinctive social world in the United States, exaggerating contrast and downplaying continuity. His view has nonetheless been influential.⁴¹

Notwithstanding Tocqueville’s portrait of white, male egalitarianism, however, the class conflict that had helped reshape ideas about gender after the revolution still pervaded American society in the nineteenth century. Critique of aristocracy, including the same gendered tropes of dissipation and corruption that fuelled Democratic Republican discourse in opposition, provided a ready-made political language for popular champions like Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren. On the other side of the equation, one form taken by anti-democratic ideology was nostalgia for the allegedly more refined and dignified society, not to mention the more deferential politics, of the late eighteenth century and its “republican court.” Thus, struggles over class power continued to take the form of debates over gender, virtue, and propriety, as well as over policy and institutions, much as they had done in the 1790s. Elite women’s sexuality, like that of socially marginalized women and men, and those who lived beyond the gender binary, remained a subject of controversy and anxiety. Meanwhile, descendants of the Churches and the Binghamms remained among the American

⁴¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York, 1994), 200, 192. Compare Linda Kerber, “Paradox of Women’s Citizenship,” 353: “In stabilizing the revolution and eliminating inherited class distinctions among whites, founding-era legislators... minimized class differences between white men”; and Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, 185: “In the United States, where class tensions were less important than they were in Europe at the time, the categories of race and gender... functioned as a collectivist and hierarchical political ideology.”

and British ruling classes. For the most part cloaked from public view, they went on benefiting from what their families had accumulated.⁴²

⁴² Angelica Church's son Philip founded the town of Angelica, New York, on land owned by his father, and lived there as the county judge until his death on the eve of the Civil War. Anne Bingham's daughter Ann Louisa became Lady Ashburton in 1835 when her husband was raised to the British peerage; her grandson William Bingham Baring, 2nd Baron Ashburton, married the daughter of the Earl of Sandwich and served as Paymaster General in the cabinet of Sir Robert Peel. For the nostalgic representation of the "republican court" in the mid-nineteenth century, see Shields and Teute, "Republican Court," 177-178.