

Abigail Adams: Persuading Her Husband

Abigail Adams (1744-1818) was the wife of Founding Father and future President John Adams. While he attended the Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1776, Abigail wrote to her husband often. Below is part of her letter from March 31, 1776.

I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.

That your sex are naturally tyrannical is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute; but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of master for the more tender and endearing one of friend. Why, then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity? Men of sense in all ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your sex; regard us then as beings placed by Providence under your protection, and in imitation of the Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness.

Questions

1. What is Abigail trying to convince her husband to do?

2. Give two examples of how she attempts to persuade him.
 - A.

 - B.

3. How would you compare the Revolutionary War cry of “No taxation without representation” to Abigail Adams’ warning of a rebellion by women?

4. What does *impunity* mean in the sentence “Why, then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity?”