



## *Participatory Democracy in Mercy Otis Warren (1727–1814)*

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When Mercy Otis Warren set out to instigate the American break with the Monarchy of England, it was in order to establish a Republic meant to be developed and sustained by a participatory democracy. With the support of James Warren, James Otis, and John Adams, Mercy Warren published her ideas and so participated in inspiring the Revolution and proving the value of participation by an educated woman. An exemplar, she became a center for political exchange of ideas through correspondence and networking with other educated women and men in power from Colonial America across to England and the celebrated historian, Catharine Macaulay.

At the close of the Revolutionary War, Warren continued participating by writing a history of its “rise, progress, and termination” and by publishing her observations on the constitution that demanded amendments, most of which became the Bill of Rights. She encouraged other women to participate by sacrifice, by expressing opinion, by their virtues of honesty, frugality, and courage, and by laboring for funds. In her last two dramas, Warren demonstrated how women have the capability of participating fully in a democracy as not only exemplars of virtue, but as warriors and leaders through word and action. She believed also that for the sake of a democracy, participation should be pluralistic, to include all educated sexes and races. In both her actions and arguments, she was ahead of her time and ahead of those who held to limit freedom and equality, especially regarding slaves, and to abide by 18th century laws of *couverture* which prevented women from being independent, voters, or office holders. For there to be participation in democracy, freedom of speech and the press must be sustained, as well as religious tolerance and full representation. For the success of a democracy, the people’s responsibility is to participate.

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