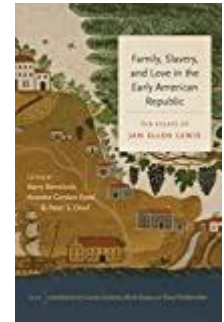


Jan Ellen Lewis. *Family, Slavery, and Love in the Early American Republic: The Essays of Jan Ellen Lewis.* Edited by Barry Bienstock, Annette Gordon-Reed, and Peter S. Onuf. Williamsburg: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2021. Illustrations. 432 pp. \$95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-6563-4.



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Scholars of the early American republic lost one of the field's stellar luminaries with the passing of Jan Ellen Lewis in 2018. In *Family, Slavery, and Love in the Early American Republic: The Essays of Jan Ellen Lewis*, editors Barry Bienstock, Annette Gordon-Reed, and Peter S. Onuf have created a masterful tribute to Lewis through a retrospective of thirteen of her most influential essays and interventions in four key themes: gender in the early American republic, the history of emotions, the Constitution and legal history, and Jefferson studies. The origins and organizational structure of this collection of essays formed at the 2019 Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR) conference panel convened to celebrate and reflect on the life and works of Lewis. In this volume, SHEAR panelists Carolyn Eastman, Nicole Eustace, David Waldstreicher, Gordon-Reed, and Onuf reprise their conference roles, contextualizing Lewis's scholarship with and against other leading historians of the time and highlighting Lewis's major contribu-

tions to the field of early American studies through the four key themes.

In their opening chapter, Gordon-Reed and Onuf position Lewis's contributions to the study of early America within a "generation of historians" who shifted emphasis from the prevailing "presidential synthesis" of the period to a more expansive social turn that explored gender, slavery, and families (p. 4). For readers new to Lewis's work, this introduction provides an excellent grounding in the field as it was in the 1980s and its subsequent growth due to Lewis's analytical emphasis on a historical era through multiple methodological approaches linking gender, emotions, culture, politics, and legal history. Lewis's husband and collection editor, Barry Bienstock, completes this tribute in the final acknowledgments section, reminding us that Lewis not only studied bonds of affection but also cultivated affective threads to family and colleagues as an integral part of her life. Between these two enriching bookends, the book is divided

into four themed sections, each introduced by a leading scholar.

The first themed section, "Gender in the Early American Republic," focuses on three of Lewis's essays that reevaluate the meaning and performance of gender in the early republic, thoughtfully introduced and contextualized by Eastman. Eastman highlights how Lewis amplified and expanded our understanding of women's historical role through "public behavior, gender roles, political engagement, and the gender dynamics of civic culture" (p. 9).

Drawing from an extensive analysis of Anglo-American literature, Lewis, in 1987, argued that popular literature of the early republic emphasized the social, political, and cultural roles of women as Republican Wives, a construct that Lewis found to be the cultural predecessor to fellow historian Linda K. Kerber's *Republican Mothers*.^[1] Lewis linked the political significance of the nation's revolutionary victory over political tyranny to literary works that encouraged independence from "patriarchal dominion" through "happy and virtuous marriage" in societies "bound by love rather than fear" while eschewing the morally corrupt behaviors of the coquette, coxcomb, and fop (pp. 20, 25, 27). Marriages built on republican ideals served a dual purpose: celebrating the moral victory of republicanism in the nation's founding and elevating women "to a new moral and political stature" (p. 31).

Much of Lewis's work centered on breaking down the gendered divisions of the public and private spheres popularized by the doctrine of separate spheres. In "Politics and the Ambivalence of the Private Sphere: Women in Early Washington, D.C.," Lewis contended that "women were nowhere, and they were everywhere" in the design and functions of the nation's new capital in the District of Columbia (p. 58). In public galleries, political gatherings, and ceremonial events women played a "critical—if hidden—part in the ideology that sustained American politics" (p. 83).

The presence of women altered the tone and tenor of public orations by transforming the Capitol "into a kind of Victorian parlor" where behaviors were "governed by the customs of polite society" instead of the raucous antics of self-interest (p. 78). Lewis addressed the challenges inherent in the concept of separate spheres by demonstrating how "women legitimated politics" by "embodying the private realm and bringing its virtues into the public" (p. 83).

In her article "Rethinking Women's Suffrage in New Jersey, 1776-1807," Lewis argued that shortly after New Jersey legislators created restrictive franchise requirements in 1807, they conveniently forgot the state's ten-year experimentation with an expanded "inclusive franchise" in which women and free persons of color held and used the political right to vote. This "genuine novelty" and "radical" enfranchisement of women, according to Lewis, was part of "an experiment in democracy" conducted by New Jersey legislators who "tweak[ed] the formula" of inclusion every few years (p. 89). Even though evidence that many women used their voting rights remained elusive from Lewis's diligent search, she still affirmed the importance of the principle of an expanded franchise by emphasizing that when the rights of women to vote were challenged, they were always affirmed.^[2] After a raucous county election rife with illegal voting, New Jersey legislators in 1807 eschewed its expansive franchise in favor of voting requirements that privileged adult white men, ostensibly to preserve "the safety, quiet, good order and dignity of the state" (p. 102). After 1807, the public memory of New Jersey's experiments with expansive political rights, according to Lewis, became "reimagined as nothing more than a bad dream" (p. 104).

Essays in the second section, "The History of Emotions," showcase Lewis's role as an early proponent of emotions history. In her introduction, Eustace connects Lewis's body of work on the history of emotions to Lewis's groundbreaking mono-

graph, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (1983), a work not reproduced in this collection but central to Lewis's articulation of emotional culture. Some of the selected essays in this section, as Eustace points out, could be revised to reflect more engagement with slavery, but there is much to be gained from Lewis's analysis of the emotional linkages between public personas and private identities.

In her 1982 essay, "Domestic Tranquillity and the Management of Emotion among the Gentry of Pre-Revolutionary Virginia," Lewis argued that the strict regulation of emotions created the ideal of "domestic tranquillity" for the gentry during the eighteenth century (p. 118). Households and families were guided by the restraint of emotions, which generated the ideas of "peace and moderation" (p. 124). Even during periods of grief Virginians "saw in mourning no practical benefit" (p. 131). Elite familial relationships during this period were defined by clear understandings of parental and filial exchanges: parents provided "material and measurable" financial gifts in exchange for their children providing dutiful care of parents in their old age (p. 123). For Virginia's white elite, the "simple, predictable, and secure" life was one "purchased only by chaining the individual's emotions" (p. 134). Readers may find the absence of any discussion of slavery jarring, a point addressed by Eustace in her introduction, yet this study of the performance and function of emotion presented a key intervention in the nascent study of the history of emotions.

In 1989 Lewis turned attention to understanding love as a "social construction" in her essay "Mother's Love: The Construction of an Emotion in Nineteenth-Century America" (p. 154). In the pages of maternal advice literature Lewis found how a mother's love and indeed her purpose in society flowed from ideals with evangelical, political, and social dimensions. By making a mother's love and guidance a condition for creating moral, intelligent, and self-governing future citizens of the re-

public, a woman's identity and political utility fused with the successes and failures of her children.

Though the doctrine of separate spheres remains a significant influence in understanding nineteenth-century life, Lewis challenged its focus on public spaces defined by capitalist markets and industrialization by arguing that political spaces were also subjected to stresses. Men like Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton found the political sphere an "emotionally draining" space that could only be soothed by the strong social affections produced in feminine domestic spaces. In "Those Scenes for Which Alone My Heart Was Made': Affection and Politics in the Age of Jefferson and Hamilton," originally published in 1998, Lewis drew from letters exchanged between these founding fathers and Hamilton's sister-in-law, Angelica Schuyler Church. For men, affection was expressed as a longing to retire from public service in politics. For elite women like Church, this period marked a reimagination of the purpose and performance of friendships. Female friendships originally constructed to build lucrative and powerful political patronage networks were increasingly encouraged to be reconstructed as bonds of affection that could hold society together, reflecting the changing nature of gendered power and influence.

The third section, "Constitution and Legal History," brings together three of Lewis's insightful essays related to the origins and legacies of the Three-Fifths Clause. She traced the intellectual history of James Wilson's 1787 amendment, which proposed to qualify representation in the lower house based on a proportion of free inhabitants "of every age sex and condition," to show that the erasure of this phrase from the final version of the clause did not symbolize an erasure of women as much as it reflected the implied redundancy of specifically including a class of people already associated with the functions of representation (p. 186). In a subsequent essay, Lewis continued to il-

illuminate the ways that these women and enslaved persons, functioning as abstract constituencies and tools for political ideologies, were “bound together” in discussions of “political disabilities” and “political incapacities” in the “democratic doctrine of representation” during the period of 1787 to 1866 (p. 213). The Three-Fifths Clause appears again in the third essay in which Lewis argued that “sectional difference came into being with the nation” through the debates over whether to connect assessments of taxation with land, wealth (including wealth from enslaved bodies), or population in the development of the nation’s governing principles between 1775 and 1787 (p. 254). By legitimizing the claims of the slaveholding South to enslaved persons as a “less productive” workforce than free laborers to gain a tax discount while simultaneously counting each enslaved person as a measurable constituency for increasing Southern representation in Congress, these compromises made slaveholding “a legitimate interest” and “encouraged [the Deep South] to make excessive demands” in later national debates (pp. 261, 280).

Waldstreicher, in his introduction to this section, deftly situates Lewis’s arguments for the centrality of the Three-Fifths Clause in understanding theories of representation and the “almost mention of women” in the Constitution against other leading historians of the time (p. 179). He rightfully applauds Lewis’s ability to meticulously show how the “mutual construction of gender and race” during the 1780s was as much “a major political as well as social or cultural development” (p. 179). Read together, the three essays in this section present a master class in how a brilliant historian can return to a legal artifact, turn it over and around, and project its impact and legacy in new and innovative ways.

Gordon-Reed and Onuf introduce the fourth section, “Jefferson Studies,” which reflects Lewis’s engagement with Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and the conflicts between understanding their roles in both the public and private spheres.

They explain how Lewis “came at Jefferson obliquely” to “better understand the emotional family dynamics in plantation households” and more broadly the milieu of the gentry during the revolutionary and early republican eras (p. 285). Lewis’s work “defamiliarized an all-too-familiar, even iconic figure” by analyzing Jefferson through his relationships to his family (white and Black) and through his conformance to national and class-based values (p. 287).

In “Jefferson and Women,” Lewis situated Jefferson’s articulation of domestic happiness within larger social and political changes occurring during his life and within the milieu of the white gentry class. Jefferson ordered his world through gender where male politics stood in opposition to female domestic bliss. This theme is expanded in “The Blessings of Domestic Society” where Lewis explored the core meaning of Jefferson’s iconic “pursuit of happiness” as a metaphor not for acquisition of property or a form of “social happiness” achieved through “good government” but for the cultivation of “private happiness” through affective (and manipulated) bonds with his family (p. 311). For Jefferson, the balm for the “bitterness of political life” was attending to the obligations of family for which in return he expected devotion and attentive love from his daughters (p. 315). Hamilton, on the other hand, believed that “his essential contribution” to the happiness of his wife was a strong public defense of honor and reputation, often through the violence of duels (p. 326). Lewis used their reactions to public scandals to explore concurrent public debates over the relationship between politics and the family and to illustrate whether “public interest” was best served by interfering with “private virtues” within the household (p. 329).

The book’s structure highlights each of the four themes as separate contributions to the field, which can be both helpful and problematic for making connections across themes and time. As a combined body of work, Lewis’s essays suggest a

fifth timely theme interwoven through each of the sections—public memory and public forgetting—especially in her treatment of the historical silences surrounding the roles women and slaves played in the creation of a national identity. It seems appropriate, then, that the final two essays in the collection grapple with the costs of one of the more prominent clashes of public memory and forgetting: the hidden and shared legacies of the Jefferson and Hemings families.

Lewis confronted the complicity of Jefferson's white family during the nineteenth century in perpetuating "a family's lie" that became "the nation's history" in her thoughtful essay "The White Jeffersons" (p. 291). Lewis provocatively asked whether knowledge of a sexual relationship between Jefferson and his enslaved woman Sally Hemings fundamentally changes what we know about the institution of slavery. Instead, she shifted the question to confront the deeper emotional and social costs of slavery: the "privilege of fair skin," children bereft of fatherly attentions, privileging who gets to tell a family (and national) story, and the emotional costs of acceptance or denial of that story (p. 379). Lewis's ability to break down "the anatomy of the lie and its consequent costs" reminds us to reconsider the greater lies our nation tells about slavery, racism, and inequalities through denial and obfuscation of the history of our past (p. 366).

Family, Slavery, and Love serves as both a tribute to Lewis's scholarship and retrospective of her significant contributions to the study of the revolutionary era and early American republic. Scholars and students will appreciate this expertly curated collection of her most intriguing and field-changing questions composed in clear and compelling prose. This collection can also serve as an invaluable textbook and teaching tool for enriching discussions of Lewis's methods for interrogating the interconnected strands of cultural, social, political, and legal beliefs that defined white elites and their worldviews; for analyzing the way these

views forged a national identity during this foundational era; and for confronting the problems of historical silences that complicate public memory.

Yet Lewis's scholarship has a broader influence beyond audiences within academia. As Gordon-Reed and Onuf point out in their introduction, Lewis recognized the "civic and moral significance" of "telling the truest possible story" of our nation's founding and our nation's founders (p. 5). By asking provocative questions, Lewis skillfully confronted the historical silences and myths Americans have created (and continue to create) through her direct engagements with the complex past. In a time when political divides over school curricula threaten to erase the complicated, messy contradictions of the nation's founding in favor of a polished yet limiting triumphal perspective, Lewis's scholarship, once again, is a timely and necessary intervention.

Notes

[1]. Linda K. Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28 (1976): 187-205; and Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

[2]. Between 2018 and 2020, archivists at the Museum of the American Revolution analyzed eighteen poll lists—lists of voters—and identified the names of 163 women who had cast their ballots in New Jersey elections held between 1800 and 1807. "How Did the Vote Expand? New Jersey's Revolutionary Decade," Museum of the American Revolution, accessed October 27, 2022, <https://www.amrevmuseum.org/virtualexhibits/when-women-lost-the-vote-a-revolutionary-story/pages/how-did-the-vote-expand-new-jersey-s-revolutionary-decade>.

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