



## Excerpt of Letter by John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776

Source: New York Historical Society <https://wams.nyhistory.org/building-a-new-nation/navigating-the-new-government/remember-the-ladies/>

### Document Excerpt

As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our struggle has loosened the bands of Government everywhere. That children and apprentices were disobedient — that schools and colleges were grown turbulent — that Indians slighted their guardians and negroes grew insolent to their masters.

But your letter was the first intimation that another tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown discontented. — This is rather too coarse a compliment, but you are so saucy, I won't blot it out.

Depend upon it, we know better than to repeal our masculine systems. Although they are in full force, you know they are little more than theory. We dare not exert our power in its full latitude. We are obliged to go fair, and softly, and in practice you know we are the subjects. We have only the name of masters, and rather than give up this, which would completely subject us to the despotism of the petticoat, I hope General Washington, and all our brave heroes would fight. I am sure every good politician would plot, as long as he would against despotism, empire, monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, or ochlocracy. — a fine story indeed. I begin to think the ministry as deep as they are wicked. After stirring up Tories, Landjobbers, Trimmers, Bigots, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Hanoverians, Hessians, Russians, Irish Roman Catholics, Scotch Renegades, at last they have stimulated the ladies to demand new privileges and threaten to rebel.

### Summary

Your idea to make the laws fairer to women made me laugh. We're heard that the revolution has inspired many people to rise up against unfairness. Children don't listen to their parents. Apprentices don't obey their masters. Students at schools and colleges are wild. Indigenous people are ignoring white governors, and enslaved people are rebelling against their enslavers.

But your letter is the first time I heard that women are planning to rebel too. I'm being very rude, but your letter was so saucy I won't cross it out.

We know better than to give women more power. You know men aren't really in charge, even if the law says so. We have to follow what women say already. If women try to fight for more equality, I hope George Washington and the army would fight back. Every politician would too. I wonder if this is part of a British plot. Now that they've turned every other group against us, they are getting women to rebel too.