



Abigail Adams: A Life

By Woody Holton



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In this new, vivid, nuanced portrait, now in paperback, prize-winning historian Woody Holton uses original sources and letters for the first time in a sweeping reinterpretation of Adams's life story and of women's roles in the creation of the republic.

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Using previously overlooked documents from numerous archives, Abigail Adams shows that the wife of the second president of the United States was far more charismatic and influential than historians have realized. One of the finest writers of her age, Adams passionately campaigned for women's education, denounced sex discrimination, and matched wits not only with her brilliant husband, John, but with Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. When male Patriots ignored her famous appeal to "Remember the Ladies," she accomplished her own personal declaration of independence: Defying centuries of legislation that assigned married women's property to their husbands, she amassed a fortune in her own name.

Adams's life story encapsulates the history of the founding era, for she defined herself in relation to the people she loved or hated (she was never neutral), a cast of characters that included her mother and sisters; Benjamin Franklin and James Lovell, her husband's bawdy congressional colleagues; Phoebe Abdee, her father's former slave; her financially naïve husband; and her son John Quincy.

At once epic and intimate, Abigail Adams, sheds light on a complicated, fascinating woman, one of the most beloved figures of American history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. While Abigail Adams has always been viewed as one of the most illustrious of America's founding mothers, University of Richmond historian Holton (*Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*), drawing on the rich collection of Adams's letters and other manuscripts, paints a strong-minded woman whose boldness developed in the context of the revolutionary era in which she lived. Holton offers a captivating portrait of a reformer both inside and outside the home. Best known for exhorting her husband, John Adams, to remember the ladies in devising America's new political system, she also, Holton has discovered, wrote a will leaving most of her property to her granddaughters, in defiance of the law that made her husband the master of all she owned. Furthermore, she was a businesswoman and invested her own earnings in ways John did not always approve of. Tracing Adams's life from her childhood as the daughter of a poor parson to her long and sometimes uncertain courtship with John, her joys and sorrows as a mother and her life as the wife of a president, Holton's superb biography shows us a three-dimensional Adams as a forward-thinking woman with a mind of her own. (Nov. 3)

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Review

"Holton... allows Abigail's voice to radiate off the page; the biography grips the reader from the beginning tale of Abigail writing her own will. A wonderful book for revolutionary history buffs, women's studies majors, and biography lovers." --*Library Journal*, starred review

"Holton vividly captures the brilliance, charm, and spunk of Abigail Adams, and shows why she deserves her place at the table along with her husband John and the other Founders. A must-read book for understanding the founding of our nation." --Walter Isaacson, author of *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*

"Captivating... biography and social history. Through his engaging prose, Holton provides a nuanced picture of Adams as representative of many women of her era yet also ahead of her time." --*Journal of American History*

About the Author

Abner Linwood "Woody" Holton, III, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Richmond in Virginia and is a member of the Richmond Research Institute. He has published two award-winning books: *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (2007), a finalist for the National Book Award; and *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves and the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia* (1999). Holton received his B.A. in English from the University of Virginia and his Ph.D. in History from Duke, and is currently an associate professor at the University of Richmond. Holton has received numerous awards, including three from the Organization of American Historians (OAH). His first book, *Forced Founders* (in which he argued that Jefferson, Washington, and other Virginia gentlemen rebelled against Britain partly in order to regain control of Native Americans, slaves, and small farmers), received the OAH's prestigious Merle Curti award for social history. In 2006, the OAH named Holton one of its Distinguished Lecturers. Holton's article, "'Divide et Impera': The Tenth Federalist in a Wider Sphere," was selected by a panel of distinguished scholars for publication in the OAH's *Best American History Essays 2006*. Holton received a Guggenheim Fellowship for the 2008-09 academic year to write *ABIGAIL ADAMS* and today lives in Richmond with his wife Gretchen Schoel (the director of an organization combating prejudice against Arabs and Muslims) and their daughter Beverly.

Users Review

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Barbara Jackson:

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