



Life of a Colonial Woman

Annotation Station

○ Circle words you don't know, and take a moment to find the definition.

Highlight in **YELLOW** phrases that confuse you. Use context clues to try and figure out their meaning.

Highlight in **RED** examples of the dangers or restrictions faced by the individuals.

Highlight in **GREEN** examples of rights and freedoms enjoyed by the individuals.

☆ Star the items that make you wonder and wish to explore further.

Exhibit 1

“A godly young Woman ... who was fallen into a sad infirmity, the loss of her understanding and reason, which had been growing upon her divers years by occasion of giving herself wholly to reading and writing and had written many books. Her husbände was loath to grieve hir [her]; but he saw his error when it was too late. For if she had attended to her household affairs, and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of hir [her] way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper for men whose minds are stronger, she had kept hir [her] Wits, and might have improved them usefully and honorably.”

History of New England,
Governor John Winthrop,
1640

Exhibit 2

“It was at that time very difficult to procure the means of instruction in those districts; female education was in consequence conducted on a very limited scale; girls learned needlework (in which they were indeed both skilful and ingenious), from their mothers and aunts; they were taught, too, at that period to read, in Dutch, the Bible. ... But in the infancy of the settlement few girls read English; when they did they were thought accomplished; they generally spoke it, however imperfectly, and a few were taught writing.”

Memoir of an American Lady,
Mrs. Anne Grant, 1809



Exhibit 3

“One woman had not less than twenty-two children, and another had no less than twenty-three children by one husband, whereof nineteen lived to man's estate, and a third was mother to seven and twenty children.”

Rev. Cotton Mather, April 1691, from *Child Life in Colonial Days*, 1899

These large families were eagerly welcomed. Children were a blessing. The Danish proverb says, ‘Children are the poor man's wealth.’ To the farmer, especially the frontiersman, every child in the home is an extra producer.”

Background

White women of European descent had very few rights and freedoms during colonial times, as their husbands held authority over them. Women did not have the right to vote or to hold any form of public office. They did not have the right to serve on juries and could not write a will without their husband's permission. Women could not buy or sell property.

There were very defined, gender-specific roles that required women to handle cooking, cleaning, farming, child-rearing, laundry, and all other household duties. While women may have had a say in raising the children, European society was based on **patriarchy**. Patriarchy is a societal system where the men are the head of the household and carry the most power. Family ancestry is passed on through men.

African women who were enslaved lived a difficult life in colonial America as their enslavers treated them as property. Enslaved African women could be bought and sold at any time. The children of an enslaved woman were automatically enslaved as well. Therefore, an enslaved African woman might find herself enslaved from birth to death.

Enslaved women of African descent were subject to harsh working and living conditions with long hours of manual labor. Punishments by the enslaver were usually violent and could result in disfigurement or death. No rights were given to enslaved people in colonial America.