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*Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early
American Republic* (review)

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debt. Since the economic bubble burst in the fall of 2008, many have had to come to terms with new standards of living, and the idea that the future might not always bring bigger and better. These lessons of the past reinforce the notion that consumption is neither a simple seller-to-buyer transaction, nor always about progress. Styles's lodgers acquired more through theft than expanding disposable income, and Hartigan-O'Connor's enslaved proxy shoppers used what they knew to express a degree of individuality within a system intended to enforce servitude and obedience. The new consumption studies are well placed to explore such individuals and the larger social, cultural, and geographic contexts in which they lived their lives, and *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture, Another City*, and, in some chapters, *Feast or Famine* strike precisely this balance. They offer a promising solution to the problem of melding micro- and macroeconomic studies as well as material and ideological worlds. Individuals and their choices appear in all three of these studies, but so too does significant investment in understanding the market forces and networks that created the options available to those making decisions.

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Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic. By Rosemarie Zagarri. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007. Pp. 233. Cloth, \$39.95; Paper, \$22.50.)

Reviewed by Simon P. Newman

From quite different vantage points, historians such as Susan Branson and Catherine Allgor have done a great deal to illuminate women's political activities in the early republic. Branson showed elite and some middling women participating in the cauldron of popular political activity in the excited revolutionary ferment of the 1790s, while Allgor demonstrated how leading women politicized the domestic sphere in early na-

tional Washington, creating a new and highly significant political arena.¹ Their work has informed our understanding of women and politics by broadening our definitions and understanding of just what comprised political activity, from wearing pro-French Revolutionary bonnets and cockades to leading Washington women's salons. Perhaps because of this, what might be termed traditional political history continues to pay little attention to the work produced by Allgor, Branson, and others in the wake of the ground-breaking books published by Linda Kerber and Mary Beth Norton in 1980.² Many historians chronicling the political history of revolutionary and early national America continue to regard women as wholly separate from the actual business of politics, and thus conclude that women can justly be excluded from their histories of political parties and the processes of local and national politics.

Rosemarie Zagarri's *Revolutionary Backlash* furnishes a powerful and successful challenge to such conclusions, by reuniting the concerns of political and women's historians. Primarily concerned with exploring why the revolution changed so little for women, and why so many women were—by the late 1820s and the early 1830s—apparently willing to accept their exclusion from the public political sphere, Zagarri's answer provides the book's title and its compelling theme. It is her contention that men and their political parties orchestrated a severe, sustained, and successful counterrevolutionary backlash against women's political activities and identities, a backlash that succeeded in justifying women's exclusion from public political roles to such a degree that many women accepted without question private and domestic roles for themselves and their daughters. Perhaps what is most exciting in this book is Zagarri's strong sense of the revolutionary possibilities of the 1790s and early 1800s, and the ways that women were challenging the very assumptions and practices of politics. Progress ended only when political parties moved to restrict political activity to white men, slamming the door on

1. Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 2001); Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville, VA, 2000).

2. Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1980); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800* (Boston, 1980).

women and effectively delegitimizing a generation of female political activity.

This argument places Zagari at odds with Whiggish interpretations of American women's history that have assumed a revolutionary-inspired progression from women's public activities in support of resistance and independence through to Republican Motherhood, a feminized domestic sphere that supported the separate, male public political sphere, the advent of female moral reform, and women's eventual emergence into public politics embodied in the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. Marshalling an impressive array of evidence, Zagari counters this familiar tale with women who embraced political identities and activities in the years following the War for Independence, but who were then attacked for their ostensible role in partisan conflict so severe as to appear to endanger the republic itself. Men concluded that women must be excluded from the political sphere, and they proceeded to do just that. The "female politicians" of the quarter-century following the Federal Constitutional Convention—the elite women who were politically informed and were able to discuss, debate, and to some degree influence political discourse—found that their daughters were not allowed such identities or activities in the years following the War of 1812.

The book opens with an engaging and comprehensive survey of the events and subsequent analysis of women's political activity in the wake of the Revolution, which provides the context for much of what follows. Zagari shows how women's politicization gendered politics in multiple ways, changing male political discourse and activity. Ever more partisan politics enabled men to use women—both women's actual activities and men's gendered representations of female and some male activity—to attack not just women's presence in politics but the very idea of political women. As such, Republican Motherhood and separate spheres emerge as far more restrictive than liberating arenas of female political activity.

It is in the final chapter that Zagari most powerfully indicts political history as it is so often taught and written. She persuasively demonstrates that the broadening of the franchise was an exclusively white male phenomenon, through which women and people of color were deliberately and definitively excluded from the polity. This is a rich and finely textured piece of political history, tracing the emergence of a new democratic reality premised upon inequality and exclusion. Never before has this position been argued so fully and so powerfully. *Revolutionary Backlash* integrates political history and women's history more effectively and

more persuasively than any previous work. Zagarri's deeply researched and gracefully written volume will inform the substance and the assumptions of future political histories, and she has made a substantial contribution to the political history of the early American republic as well as to the history of American women between the Revolution and the election of Andrew Jackson.

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