

*Important Note: This is a mostly complete draft copy of the final essay from my U.S. Historiography to 1877 class. I was only able to find the draft copy because the final version was downloaded onto a former laptop and was not backed up to the cloud. However, I still wanted to showcase the piece as it stands as it is still a major assignment from my graduate coursework and one of my personal favorite pieces from my first semester.*

While studying history throughout my college years into graduate school, I have discovered more stories and perspectives than I could have possibly imagined. I had thought my high school training and my outside research in my younger years had given me a solid foundation to build upon. But what I have realized is that there are so many histories untold, so many groups who were crucial to various times and places but are glossed over in favor of the smoother narrative. One of these groups would be women. In the history classroom in secondary education, women may specifically be covered for a short period of time, anywhere from a week to a single day. In U.S. history, for example, women are often more directly covered in the history of the suffrage movement and the fight for women's rights. Outside of that, they may only get a few short paragraphs in the textbook.

Because of this, I feel that it is public historians' responsibility to teach the public the history that they did not get to learn in school. Museums fill in the gaps in knowledge and catch those who may not have continued their historical education past high school. For many, these institutions will be the only opportunity they have to correct their previously assumed knowledge. With the recent approval of the creation of a Smithsonian America Women's History Museum, I want to propose the creation of a permanent or large traveling exhibit surrounding the history of women in early America. As colonial and Revolutionary history has always been a popular topic to the American public, I believe that it would be a good place to start opening

people's minds up to a broader view of history, including women's widespread influence on their communities.

The overall exhibit will be housed in a large set of rooms that flow into each other, similar to the permanent exhibit at the American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. From there, the exhibit will be divided into distinct sections: women in the founding of the thirteen colonies, women in the domestic space, women in the workplace, Native American women, enslaved women, and women in the American Revolution. The narrative of the exhibit will flow chronologically whenever possible, but also thematically so that the transitions between sections are smooth. Above all, each of the sections will be backed by strong sources to ensure that the most accurate information is being provided to visitors.

The exhibit will begin with the colonization of early America and the roles that women played in the journey across the ocean and in the earliest settlements. I want to start with their thoughts, hopes, and dreams for the New World with a brief account of life on the ships to come overseas. Then I will delve more into early colonial life. One case will be based on Kim Todt's article in *Women of Early America*, "Women Are as Knowing Therein as the Men: Dutch Women in Early America", which examines the lives of the women in New Netherland. Dutch women experienced some similarities in lifestyle to others in early America. They received an education, they sought good husbands for marriage, and they bore and raised children in the same tradition they were raised in (44). Girls were admitted to elementary school but barred from higher education (47). However, they did have the opportunity to participate in vocational training. For example, Maria von Cortlandt operated a brewery for her father, likely taught brewing methods by him. Dutch women were granted more independence than others with the ability to take on additional economic responsibilities. Women traded with Native Americans,

operated taverns and brickyards, and even became some of the most “substantial intercolonial or transatlantic traders” that rivaled the men (52). As the article mentions that not much scholarship has been done on this particular colony, I think it would be a good history to highlight.

One of the crucial sources involved in educating visitors on the central role of Native American women to their tribes is Susan Sleeper-Smith's *Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio River Valley, 1690-1792*. In this book, Sleeper-Smith examines how Native American women established the Ohio Valley as a Native paradise by developing a system to preserve the land's natural resources while still removing from it what was necessary to survive. In prior scholarship, historians had failed in truly understanding the extent of Native women's involvement with agriculture. Therefore, their role had been downplayed and ignored in mainstream history for a long time. They had planted and cultivated European fruit trees by trading with other Native Americans who had already had contact with Europeans before the Ohio Valley saw its first visitors (15). Native women cultivated corn and wheat along the riverways, better than the Anglo-Americans in the region, allowing them to produce greater yields per acre (28). They even raised domesticated animals they had traded for. When it came to trade, Native women facilitated early fur exchanges by processing furs, manufacturing products, and supplying food to fur traders (70). Ultimately, it was Native women who created the kin networks and trading networks that established the shared landscape in the region, binding people together through social and cultural practices.

To capture the Native American experience in early America, it would be crucial to work with the local tribes whose ancestors lived in the Ohio Valley region during that time. I would reach out to these tribes and start a dialogue. In public history, particularly with minority histories, it is important for historians to engage with the people affected by that history. I would

never try to create a Native American exhibit without their input. My hope would be to collaborate on the narrative of Native American women's lives in the Ohio River Valley region, negotiate for a loan of items, and offer spaces on the exhibit planning committee to keep them involved in the entire exhibit.

For the exhibit section itself, I would want to showcase agricultural tools, furs that may have been used for trading, personal items, and clothing. While I want to give a brief sense of overall Native American life in early America, I would prefer to focus on women's experiences. These items should be acquired ethically through negotiation and loans from Native American tribes or created as exact replicas, a common practice in certain types of museums. The original object is always better, so it would be acceptable to pull items from other Native American tribes outside of the Ohio Valley Region if they are similar. To further educate the public, I would also create educational programming about Native Americans in early America: their tribes, their livelihoods, and their interactions with the colonists, good and bad. I believe that more museums that have content surrounding early America should expand their content on Native Americans as it is a crucial part of the history that is not often covered with the public.

One of the more controversial stories that I want to highlight is that of Ona Judge, George and Martha Washington's runaway slave. Her story was first introduced to me by Erica Armstrong Dunbar's book, *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge*. Daughter of one of the enslaved seamstresses owned by the Washingtons, Ona Judge was brought to New York and Philadelphia to serve as Martha Washington's personal maid after George Washington became the president of the United States. Throughout the book, Dunbar weaves in the political and social history of the time, focusing on the North's views towards slavery and what efforts were being made to eliminate it within their

borders. Philadelphia had large free black and abolitionist communities that showed Ona Judge a different kind of life that was possible for her. Once she fled, the book pivots to life as a runaway slave creating an entirely new world for themselves while making sure to both make a living and stay hidden from those who may want to bring them back to their former masters. In this narrative, we find that Ona Judge was one of the luckiest as the man sent to catch her was highly reluctant to bring her back, and it allowed her to sink further into the new community that she was creating for herself. While Ona Judge and other slaves' voices are the primary ones heard in this book, Dunbar makes sure to include opinions and actions of influential white people of the time to bring in context that other sources are unable to provide. I would like to find a few documents of Washington's regarding Ona Judge's disappearance and some artifacts from the community she was able to escape to. It would also be a good opportunity to show how free black women lived.

Finally, visitors will arrive at the section covering women's contributions to the American Revolution. This portion will be built on the back of Holly A. Mayer's article, "Bearing Arms, Bearing Burdens: Women Warriors, Camp Followers, and Home-Front Heroines of the American Revolution. Mayer argued that the many roles that women played throughout the Revolutionary War legitimized it as "a people's war" (170). Many women had to take on greater responsibilities in the home, on the farm, and in town to keep the economy running and their families supported. The public and private sphere often separated to men and women were now blended. Others followed their husbands to war as "camp followers". They cooked meals for the soldiers, washed their clothes, and packed provisions and gear when the army was on the move (176). Women also fought in the war. A few women who had followed their husbands bravely manned the guns when too many men had fallen (175). Some women even dressed up as

men and joined the Patriot forces. One story to highlight would be that of Deborah Sampson. As a single woman in her twenties, she served in the Continental Army under the name 'Robert Shurtliff' for over a year (174). She fought in battle until she was wounded and discovered in 1783 when she was forced to let a doctor treat her (174). Another would be that of Anna Maria Lane who fought in the Battle of Germantown in 1777 and "performed extraordinary military services and received a severe wound." (175) She was given a pension from the Virginia General Assembly in recognition of her service (175).

This exhibit section should capture as many of these stories as it can as many visitors may not have been introduced to them before. The exhibit cases will show items from camp, particularly items for cooking, cleaning, and washing. I would like to also display some of the guns that may have been used in the war, likely rifles. Two large panels will display the stories of Deborah Sampson and Anna Maria Lane along with their portraits. Each case will bring in elements from women's roles in the other sections: woman as caretaker, woman as provider, woman as defender. The combination of these will be a crucial conclusion to the overall exhibit.

I want visitors to leave this exhibit simply knowing more. Women's history is so often neglected in the public memory. It is long since overdue for women's roles in history to be brought to the forefront. My hope is that the public will start to recognize the impactful roles that women had during the beginning of our country and expand their worldview. The more we can teach people about other histories, the more we can hope to build a brighter future.