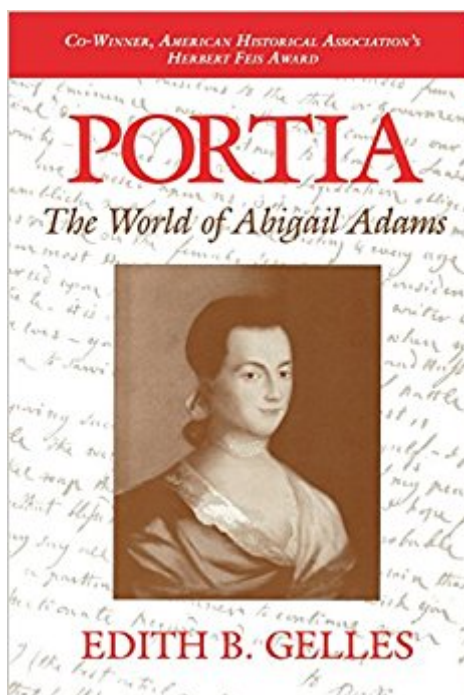


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# Portia: The World Of Abigail Adams



## Synopsis

"... best-of-all-biographies of Abigail Adams..." — *American Historical Review* "Portia, a new study of Abigail Adams' modern feminism's favorite Founding Mother is a refreshing change of pace." — *San Francisco Chronicle* "... very well done, highly perceptive, and full of fresh ideas." — *Wilson Library Bulletin* "... Adams' strength, courage, and wit (as well as her bouts of depression and gender conservatism) emerge more fully than they have in any previous work.... a well-rounded portrait of a remarkable figure." — *Choice* "In this important and fascinating biography, Edith Gelles not only restores Abigail Adams to her rightful place at the center of her own story, she challenges the creaky conventions of traditional male-defined biography." — Susan Faludi, author of *Backlash* "Portia, the first woman-centered biography of Abigail Adams, details the issues, events, and relationships of Adams' life. It is as much a social and cultural history of Adams' time as it is her life story."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This fascinating biography of one of the original first ladies presents a strong character in the context of her eighteenth century and recent feminist thought. Compassionate yet scholarly, intimate yet important, this book offers a refreshing addition to the biographical canon.

Feminist historian Gelles's biography of Adams (who used Portia as her pen name) emphasizes Adams's life story over her, perhaps better-known, roles as wife of one U.S. President and mother of another. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Gelles presents for us Abigail Adams in a new light...the domestic woman. By telling her story thematically (one chapter devoted to her and her sisters, one devoted to her daughter and Abigail's fight with breast cancer) we meet a new Abigail...one who is not weighed down by proto-feminist thought, nor is she trying to dominate the home. Abigail was an unusual woman in a few ways, but keep in mind that she kept a family together by herself for the many years when John Adams was in Philadelphia or England or France. She acted within social norms as a "deputy husband" (to use the language of the times). Although at times I question if Gelles isn't slightly underestimating the second first lady of the US...she presents a new counterpoint to the large body of Abigail Adams scholarship out there. For those scholars of Abigail Adams, her first chapter basically presents in a historiographical manner the various types of Abigail scholarship out there, offering a critique of many of the well-known authors. It is a bit dry at times, but is not at all painful to read.

In our post Hilary-Clinton world, we assume that the First Lady will influence the President to some degree or another. John and Abigail Adams, however, were a couple like no other. Their partnership was amazing and John could not have been the man he was (revolutionary, founding father, statesman, president, friend, husband and father), without Abigail. She helped balance him, shared her intelligent and insightful views with him in ways that were supportive and helpful, gave up much of the life she probably envisioned with him so that he could serve his country in a variety of ways, managed his domestic and financial life alone for much of their marriage, and truly loved down to her core this sometimes difficult man. This book is a great addition to our knowledge of this complex woman. It is worth reading just to understand her better, aside from her well-biographed husband.

I think Abigail Adams is one of the greatest and most interesting women in American history. This book gives us a picture of her as a young woman, as the wife and confidant of John, as a mother, as a manager of farms and homes, and as a friend to many. It also gives us a window into her life as a woman with a rich and interesting life of the mind and the heart. A great read!

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