

distinctive ability to write, as it were, between the lines was something she found very useful, whether discussing the divisive factionalism of the late 1770s, the shortcomings of the proposed constitution in 1787, or the politics that she and other women held. It was a talent of which she was intensely proud and also one that might—and often did—draw fire. But Stuart's book conveys very little sense of Warren's evident pride in her own literary abilities, her characteristic spikiness, or her particular capacity to make enemies. We find out that varicella apparently caused Warren to lose sight in one eye, but we see very little of her actual blind spots, particularly those concerning her own family and its fortunes.

In short, we simply don't get any sense of what made Mercy Otis Warren tick. The narrative never pauses for reflection or exegesis. Time just tramps steadily onward, through descriptions of events illustrated from Warren's letters and the other standard archival and secondary material in which Stuart has immersed herself. Such a relentlessly descriptive and chronological narrative style would be a shortcoming in a biography of any individual, but it is a particularly disappointing feature in a book purporting to illuminate the life and work of a truly Revolutionary writer who left behind such a fluent, intriguing, and important literary legacy.

So quite unlike her friend Abigail Adams—also a wonderful eighteenth-century writer but one whose rhetorical modes of address are perhaps more amenable to a modern audience—Mercy Otis Warren is still waiting for a good biographer. If the reader is interested in her life and writing, I would personally recommend Rosemarie Zagarri's accomplished introduction, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (1995), or the University of Georgia's just-published *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters*, edited by Jeffrey H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris. Now those are books worth reading.

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Mr. Adams's Last Crusade: John Quincy Adams's Extraordinary Post-Presidential Life. By Joseph Wheelan. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008. Pp. xix, 311. \$26.95 cloth; \$15.95 paper.)

There have been remarkably few successful second acts by former American presidents. Andrew Johnson was elected to the Senate but

died after a few months in office. William Howard Taft served as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court for nine years. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton have become prominent advocates of various social and humanitarian causes. But John Quincy Adams remains the gold standard. Elected to Congress in 1830, just two years after suffering a crushing electoral defeat at the hands of Andrew Jackson, he served eight highly contentious terms. By February 1848, when the eighty-year-old Adams was fatally stricken on the floor of the House of Representatives shortly after voting against a tribute to officers who had served in the Mexican War, he had become the rallying point for Congressional opponents of slavery.

In *Mr. Adams's Last Crusade*, Joseph Wheelan, the author of well-regarded popular histories of the First Barbary War, the trial of Aaron Burr, and the Mexican-American War, takes on Adams's struggle against slavery. Wheelan sets the stage by reviewing Adams's remarkable pre-Congress political career: teenage secretary to his diplomat-father, John Adams; state and U.S. senator; American minister to four European nations; secretary of state; and president. Adams insisted that he operated according to the code of the founders, meaning that public life was to be devoted to the service of the whole nation, not to narrowly partisan ends or personal ambitions. The loss of the presidency in 1828 to Jackson, a "military chieftain" who (as Adams saw it) embodied these evils, was to Adams a personal rebuke as well as a sign of national degradation. In the aftermath, Adams's family, particularly his wife, Louisa Catherine, opposed his reentry into politics and later his high-profile assaults on slavery. Adams, however, regarded his election—which he did not solicit—as personal vindication. "No election or appointment conferred upon me ever gave me so much pleasure," he noted in his journal.

Wheelan briskly encapsulates Adams's major Congressional activities, including his efforts on behalf of what became the Smithsonian Institution, his support of tariff reform and internal improvements, and his opposition to Indian removal. It was the campaign against slavery, though, that took center stage. According to Wheelan, Adams's great (but private) epiphany about the evils of the system occurred during the debate over the Missouri Compromise in 1820–21. Then, in the mid-1830s, the controversies generated by the growing abolitionist movement fired Adams's conscience again. This time he waded into the battle publicly and wholeheartedly, inspiring young Whig reformers like William Seward of New York while incurring the hatred of slaveholders and the dislike of Northern

conservatives, the latter of whom simply wanted the matter to go away. Although Adams never identified himself with the radical abolitionist agenda, he drew increasingly close to such prominent abolitionists as Lewis Tappan, Joshua Giddings, and the Grimké sisters. He joined the legal team that sought to free the *Amistad* slaves, proposed Constitutional amendments that would have brought about the gradual abolition of slavery, opposed the annexation of Texas and the Mexican-American War, and spoke of the possibility of an apocalyptic Civil War in which slaves would be emancipated by Congress's invocation of its inherent war powers.

Adams fought his battles primarily by clever indirection, defending the right of citizens to petition Congress against various aspects of the so-called peculiar institution, such as its existence in the District of Columbia. Adams's opponents, the slaveholding South and its Northern political allies, in turn enacted increasingly restrictive "gag rules," which prevented the reception or discussion of such petitions. Through ingenious parliamentary maneuvers, provocative speeches, and vitriolic rejoinders, Adams engaged in a decade-long war against the gag rule, stirring Emerson to observe in amazement, "He is an old roué who cannot live on his slops, but must have sulphuric acid in his tea" (p. 189). Outraging his adversaries when he sought to introduce a petition supposedly signed by slaves (he later revealed blandly that the petition called for the *continuation* of slavery), Adams defended the right of women—including free black women—to petition against slavery and, in a move that set off a political firestorm and calls for Adams's censure, offered a petition from Haverhill, Massachusetts, which called for the dissolution of the Union. Claiming the floor in his own defense, the former president took full advantage of the opening to launch a dramatic public attack against the Slave Power. His weary opponents gave in and laid the censure resolution on the table; two years later, the gag rule itself was repealed. "Not only was it a victory for Adams," Wheelan writes, "it was the antislavery movement's first consequential victory over the American slave power—and a turning point in the nation's history" (p. 223).

Wheelan observes correctly that Adams's political strategy was designed to demonstrate that the slaveholding system not only denied slaves their human rights (about which many whites were ambivalent or worse) but also threatened the constitutional rights of all Americans. This line of argument was a crucial step in developing a Northern antislavery majority that cut across the existing Whig/Democrat political divide. Notes Wheelan, "Adams became Congress' conscience—a prickly, sarcastic, and highly articulate voice

of reason” (p. viii), the “de facto chief spokesman for many of those denied a voice in government—abolitionists silenced by the Gag Rule, slaves, Indians, and finally, women” (p. 150).

Mr. Adams's Last Crusade necessarily reflects the limits of popular history, for Wheelan does not delve deeply into the issues that have been raised by recent scholarship about slavery, the antislavery movement, and the “slave power” conspiracy thesis; those interested in a more detailed academic treatment of Adams and the slavery debate should consult William Lee Miller’s *Arguing about Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress* (1996). Although Wheelan makes good use of published primary sources, including Adams’s voluminous diary, he relies less extensively on Adams’s unpublished correspondence and other archival material and does not challenge Adams’s account of his own nonpartisan, disinterested motivations. He also overlooks the fact that some of Adams’s most pointed criticism came from within his own family. Henry Adams argued that his grandfather had originally turned a blind eye to slavery in order to advance his public career; once the South turned him out of the presidency, he reacted out of shame and a desire for revenge. Another grandson, Brooks Adams, wondered if, at the end of his life, Adams had come to doubt the existence of his God and the cause of his Union. Even those sympathetic to Adams believed that his difficult personality and provocative tactics often harmed more than helped his cause.

That said, Wheelan offers an engaging narrative about an exceptional character, one whose death stirred strong emotions and regret in the South as well as the North. Americans of all stripes recognized John Quincy Adams as the last living connection with the founders and a prophet of difficult times to come.

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Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America. By Eric Jay Dolin. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2007. Pp. 479. \$27.95 cloth; \$15.95 paper.)

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Mercy Otis Warren: Select has been added to your Cart. Add a gift receipt for easy returns. Share. University of Georgia Press. Publication date. February 15, 2009. JEFFREY H. RICHARDS is a professor of English at Old Dominion University and author of a literary biography of Mercy Otis Warren among other books. SHARON M. HARRIS is a professor of English at the University of Connecticut. The author or editor of numerous books, she is founder of the Society for the Study of American Women Writers. Start reading Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters on your Kindle in under a minute. Don't have a Kindle? Get your Kindle here, or download a FREE Kindle Reading App. Mercy Otis Warren (September 14, [September 25, New Style] 1728 – October 19, 1814) was a poet, playwright and pamphleteer during the American Revolution. During the years before the American Revolution, Warren published poems and plays that attacked royal authority in Massachusetts and urged colonists to resist British infringements on colonial rights and liberties. She was married to James Warren, who was likewise heavily active in the independence movement. texts. Mercy Otis Warren. by. Richards, Jeffrey H. Publication date. 1995. Warren, Mercy Otis, 1728-1814 -- Criticism and interpretation, Literature and history -- United States -- History -- 18th century, Women and literature -- United States -- History -- 18th century, United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783 -- Literature and the revolution. Publisher. New York : Twayne Publishers ; London : Prentice Hall International. Books for People with Print Disabilities. Internet Archive Books. Uploaded by station30.cebu on October 27, 2020. SIMILAR ITEMS (based on metadata). Terms of Service (last updated 12/31/2014). Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters. In this Book. Additional Information. Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters. Mercy Otis Warren Edited by Jeffrey H. Richards and Sharon M. Harris. 2009. Book. Published by: University of Georgia Press. View. View Citation. contents. summary. This volume gathers more than one hundred letters-most of them previously unpublished-written by Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814). Until now, Warren's letters have been published sporadically, in small numbers, and mainly to help complete the collected correspondence of some of the famous men to whom she wrote. This volume addresses that imbalance by focusing on Warren's letters to her family members and other women.