

*Family, Slavery, and Love in the Early American Republic: The Essays of Jan Ellen Lewis*. Edited by Barry Bienstock, Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 432 pp. \$39.95. Hardcover ISBN-13: 9781469665634.

*Family, Slavery, and Love in the Early American Republic* is a collection of essays by the late Jan Ellen Lewis, a historian of the Early American Republic who was, in the words of editors Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf, naturally gifted, “a beautiful and nimble writer,” and an all-around “great historian” (1). Her thirteen essays provide not only a history of the Early American Republic but also, by benefit of Lewis’s long and storied career, historiographical background on gender studies, the history of emotions, and the cultural turn’s effect on political and constitutional history.

The volume is divided into four sections: gender in the Early American Republic, the history of emotions, constitutional and legal history, and Jefferson studies. Each section begins with an introductory essay by a leading scholar in the field, all of whom clearly respected if not cared deeply for Lewis. The selected essays span Lewis’s career, with the earliest published in 1982 and the most recent in 2019. Taken together, one can measure the evolution of Lewis’s scholarship and marvel at her cutting-edge research at a time when the history of the Early Republic was a “moribund field” (3).

The introductory essays are particularly helpful in situating Lewis in her historiographical periods. Though Lewis’s studies are firmly situated in the United States, her methodological approaches to emotions, gender, and legal history can and did significantly shape scholarship in world history more broadly. In the first section, gender, Carolyn Eastman places Lewis’s work in context of the cultural turn and Joan W. Scott’s famous essay on gender as a “useful category of historical analysis.” Lewis’s three pieces in this section analyzed “gender rather than women per se” to explore the meanings of marriage and republicanism, women in the public sphere and the performance of gender in politicians’ speeches, and how eliminating woman suffrage in New Jersey was part of a national conversation about who belonged in the body politic (9).

In the next section, Nicole Eustace traces the origins of the history of emotions, a necessary activity considering Lewis helped create the field. Through her insistence that the family and the scripted nature of the gentry’s private life were essential to politics, Eustace writes, Lewis demonstrated the links between “emotional culture and political ideology, between the regulation of emotion and the ordering of civic life” (108). The three essays included investigate the relationship between constructed ideas of motherhood and political and religious ideologies, the importance of “affection” in the Founders’ model of civic and social unity, and how the “pursuit of happiness” involved a “complementary” relationship between sentimental culture and race-based slavery (115).

Race and gender, Lewis demonstrated, were essential aspects of constitutional history as well. David Waldstreicher’s introductory essay to the Constitution section walks the reader through Lewis’s insistence that “the Constitution includes women,” as women “became the referent for citizens who were not members of political society” (178-9). Lewis’s work on the Three-

Fifths Compromise reveals the intertwined nature of gender and race in questions of representation for women and the enslaved. Waldstreicher also makes a subtle reference to the ongoing debate about the Constitution as a liberating document by stating that unlike Gordon Wood, Lewis argued that “[W]omen and African Americans did not remain unaffected by, or just eventually benefit from, ‘the transforming radicalism of the American Revolution.’” To Lewis, “gender and race were foundational because they were constitutional” (175).

In the final section, Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf recount Lewis’s contributions to the study of Thomas Jefferson through her exploration of his family, both black and white. The two note that though Lewis’s works on Jefferson are “some of the most astute and elegant writings about Jefferson ever written,” he was never the “sole point” of her study (283). The essays included do not center on Jefferson himself and instead reflect Lewis’s preoccupation with gender, emotions, and the family in the Early Republic. In doing so, we can learn more about Jefferson by “bringing him down to earth” and firmly situating him as a wealthy Virginian in the Early Republic, not a godlike Founder (287).

All scholars agreed that, in addition to her “natural gift for words,” what made Jan Ellen Lewis special was the holistic nature of her work. Refusing to tie herself to one category of analysis, Lewis dubbed herself “a historian of the period she studied” who paid attention to gender, race, emotions, and politics to do so (1-2). Eastman fondly likened Lewis to a detective from the mystery novels that she loved, delighting in “unpacking the meanings” of texts and “providing big, satisfying conclusions to help us understand the past” (19). In this celebration of her life and works there is little criticism apart from Eustace’s section on slavery and capitalism. Even then, Eustace posits that “in light of the vast amount of recent work on human commodification in Atlantic slavery,” Lewis might refine her arguments “if she were here to revisit these issues today” (115).

While reading this volume, a thought frequently came to mind: this is a labor of love. It was not surprising to learn that an editor thought the same (406). The affection and admiration felt toward Lewis emanate from every contributor, especially in the acknowledgements by Barry Bienstock, Lewis’s husband, and an editor of the volume. It is a fitting tribute to Lewis’s scholarship and will also be of use to those interested in the history of the Early American Republic and how investigations of race, gender, and emotions provided insight into politics, the constitution, and Thomas Jefferson himself. The explanatory introductions to each section, combined with the length of the articles and Lewis’s accessible prose, make this book a great addition to graduate courses or even an advanced undergraduate class.

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