



Education (Right of) in Mercy Otis Warren (1727–1814)

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For Mercy Otis Warren, if the rights of citizens be the “primary object for all government,” then the right to education ought to be fostered and protected. The right of citizens to an education is rooted in the nature of man and the nature of a republic. Warren claims in her *History*: “if the education of youth both public and private, is attended to, their industrious and economical habits maintained, their moral character and that assemblage of virtues supported, which is necessary for the happiness of individual and nations, there is not much danger that they will for a long time be subjugated by the arms of foreigners, or that their republican system will be subverted by the arts of domestic enemies.” Without an “enlightened civility” educated in the “principles of liberty,” that republic and its individual citizens will be in danger, for they will not be prepared for the “game of deception.” So, virtue and liberty need be enforced by an educated citizenship and “learned and virtuous writers.”

Without education, God-given abilities and “science” would both be “neglected,” and the “beautiful theory of republicanism” not wrought by the writings of “philosophers.” An early education must be established and administered to as it was by the first settlers who established “public schools...in every town in the northern colonies” though not in the southern, and strengthened by the 1771 Poor Laws. Knowledge and property, more evenly divided in northern states, ensured, consequently, that a “spirit of more equal liberty was diffused.” In letters, Warren expressed her admiration of Hester Chapin’s 1773 *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Lady* and Catharine Macaulay’s 1790 *Letters on Education* and reasoning, and concluded that the right to a thorough education is meant for the citizenry and all races and sexes.

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