Hello. My name is Hannah Buzolits. I will be discussing how after the American Revolution, the role of women in society changed and there was a need for them to be educated.

Before the American Revolution, the role of women was mainly in the home. They had very little civil obligations. The war introduced new opportunities for women to be involved in society. It was their duty to tend to the home and assist the war effort while their husbands were on the battlefield. The civil duties for women did not die with the end of the war. With the birth of a fragile nation, the role of women shifted to ensure the next generation of Americans carried on the principles of liberty and government. Because of this new responsibility, education became very important for all women.

One who understood the importance of educating the caretakers of the next generation of American leaders was Benjamin Rush. Rush was a member of the Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence. He also served as a trustee of the Young Ladies Academy in Philadelphia. His landmark lecture, *Thoughts upon Female Education*, emphasized to men how vital it was for the new nation to educate its women in order to have a society of involved and effective citizens. He also outlined in which areas women should be knowledgeable. It was
the job of the women to uphold the morals and manners of the country. Therefore, Rush argues that women's education had a social and patriotic purpose.

Rush explains certain duties in the home that require women to be educated. As a wife, women were expected to run a stable household. In order to accomplish this, women had to manage finances of the estate and be the “steward” and “guardian” of their husbands' property. This position needed certain bookkeeping and bartering skills to prevent women from being taken advantage of. What also stressed the education of women was the fact that servants were indigenous people. Rush claims that in Great Britain, servants were Englishman and were expected to be intelligent enough to handle the affairs of the estate. In America, this could not be expected of the indigenous servants. This role was then delegated to women, hence the need for female education.

While tending to the home is of significant, the focal responsibility of women is motherhood. Since children learn so much from their mothers, the burden of teaching them proper values rested on women. It is for this reason, Rush explains, women must be educated to a certain degree to teach principles of liberty and government to their children. More specifically, mothers must teach their sons these principles. The goal of every mother was to raise educated sons who were prepared to carry out their civic duties and better society.

Republican Motherhood is a term coined in the 1800s to describe mothers who raised good patriotic sons. These women were educated and satisfied the role described by Rush. The impeccable example of a Republican Mother was Abigail Adams. She raised her son to be strong and effective leader of the United States. In a
letter to her son, John Quincy Adams, she writes “Justice, humanity, and benevolence are the duties you owe to society in general” (Adams, 136). Adams reminds her son not to forget the values she taught him and the obligation he has to his country.

Education aided Adams in teaching her son ethics he used in running the country.

Rush’s lecture provided excellent points for why American women needed an education. Historians claim that the reasons he provided contributed to an increase in educational opportunities for women (Woloch, 138). Margaret Nash claims that Rush’s lecture, yet insightful, was not the main cause for an increase in these opportunities. She argued that well before the American Revolution more women were receiving basic schooling due to principles of the Enlightenment (Nash, 171-172). These beliefs explained the need for a high standard of intelligence for all citizens in order for a prosperous society.

Education of women allowed them to broaden their ability to contribute American society. By having the knowledge and skill to educate their children, they insured that the next generation of Americans carried on the values that the colonists fought to protect.
Works Cited


