

cal eye for detail, Perlstein mines news articles, numerous historical monographs and books of the period, and, to a lesser degree, archival documents to capture vividly the rage that animated this era's politics among both conservatives and the New Left.

Hardhats clubbed antiwar demonstrators in New York City, and Nixon's vice president, Spiro Agnew, emerged as a "law-and-order vanguardist" who railed against campus ruffians and attacked the liberal media as "nattering nabobs of negativism." The National Guard, rifles and bayonets at the ready, cracked down on protesters at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago while chants of "kill the pigs!" went up as police waded into the crowds.

But there is a cartoonish and ultimately unconvincing quality to Perlstein's portrayal of political figures. Nixon is purely Machiavellian. Agnew is irredeemably vicious. George McGovern is utterly incompetent. Politicians of all stripes are depicted as lacking substantive ideas about public policy and foreign affairs. The Left and the Right are united only by their incivility and contempt for the other side. Human decency is virtually absent from these pages.

There are other problems as well. The narrative tends toward the grandiose, as if an already dramatic storyline had to be written with big and bold strokes to capture the tenor of the times. Perlstein italicizes ("Agnew *hated* beards"). When Nixon aide John Erlichman warned administration official Leon Panetta to stop saying that Nixon favored civil rights, Perlstein needlessly deadpans, "Silly Leon." Nixon is described as "lustily" pursuing his goals.

Still, Perlstein's history of violence in America—of street crime but also ideologically charged attacks on Americans by other Americans, and their effect on electoral politics—is a stark reminder of the bitter divisions of the Lyndon Johnson–Nixon years. Despite its overreach, *Nixonland* is an important work of synthesis, capturing a moment when ideological, racial, gender, and moral conflicts rent the electorate. While issues including class tensions, the growing influ-

ence of the Sunbelt in presidential politics, and Nixon's foreign policy receive short shrift, Perlstein provides a thorough and provocative analysis that reinforces, with a wealth of detail, the roots of conservatism's successes.

Whether American politics is still defined by the violence of Nixon's age, as Perlstein concludes, is debatable. Nonetheless,

public morality did emerge as a dominant factor in American politics in the late 1960s. The Watergate scandal ultimately derailed Nixon's career. But his Republican successors moved in to pick up the pieces, and *Nixonland* is a bracing reminder of how some

divisions from Nixon's presidency continue to haunt debates about abortion rights, flag pins, and gay marriage—issues likely to play a part in presidential politics for the foreseeable future.

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## Meet Mrs. Warren

Reviewed by Edith Gelles

MERCY OTIS WARREN'S REPUTATION is based largely on her magnum opus, the incomparable *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the American Revolution*. Published in 1805, it is one of the earliest histories of that era.

That an 18th-century woman was inspired to believe she could write history—indeed, did write it—is remarkable. Still, today her *History* is hardly known, much less read outside the circle of scholarly specialists on the revolutionary era. Unlike that of her friend Abigail Adams, Warren's place in the pantheon of the American Revolution has been shortchanged, even ignored, in the stream of recent popularizations of the founding "greats."

**THE MUSE OF THE REVOLUTION:**  
The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation.

By Nancy Rubin Stuart.  
Beacon. 314 pp. \$28.95

Given her extraordinary accomplishments and the paucity of records on women of that era, this neglect is unfortunate.

Born in 1728 into the large, affluent, and politically influential Otis family of Barnstable, Massachusetts, Mercy married James Warren, a politician and gentleman farmer from Plymouth, in 1754. She bore five sons, three of whom suffered tragic ends, lending her life a sad undercurrent. She befriended most of the leaders of the American Revolution, including, early in his career, John Adams, who introduced his young wife to this formidable matron, knowing that theirs would be a rare combination of domestic and intellectual compatibility. Warren's correspondence was far flung among politicians and literati of the period—including the British historian Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay and friends, Hannah Winthrop, and Ellen Lothrop. She published—pseudonymously, of course—poetry and plays in public jour-



*Mercy Otis Warren (1763), by John Singleton Copley*

nals, often on political themes.

Until Warren's death in 1814, she and Abigail Adams continued to correspond. Her friendship with John Adams was more vexed. During his vice presidency, she asked for political favors for her husband and sons that he declined to grant on the grounds that doing so would be favoritism. Thereafter their friendship cooled, especially as the Warrens, disillusioned by their antipathy to the new constitution and by the postwar depression that devastated their fortune, broke politically with Adams. In her *History*, Warren included few mentions of Adams, and those she did make he found disparaging, a slight that resulted in a prolonged and heated exchange that terminated their friendship for several years.

Aside from the customary male slant in American history, other reasons account for Warren's invisibility. Though related to important men of the period, she was not the wife of a president, as was Abigail Adams. Furthermore, fewer of her letters survive, whereas Abigail Adams's surviving letters number several hundred, at least. Warren did not write for the modern reader. Her style is mannered and pretentious, and her ponderous sentences and obscure classical references contrast sharply with Adams's elegant prose.

In a 1774 letter to Abigail Adams, for example, Warren wrote of her concern that American institutions not be subverted by the First Continental Congress: "I hope they will have no uncommon Difficulties to surmount or Hostile Movements to impede them, but if the Locrians should interrupt them, tell him [John Adams] I hope they will beware that no future annals may say they Chose an ambitious Philip for their Leader, who subverted the Noble order of the American Amphycytions; and Built up a Monarchy on the Ruins of the Happy institution."

Nancy Rubin Stuart, the author of several popular biographies of women, presents Warren in a colorfully anecdotal style. Given the difficulty of reconstructing Warren's life, Stuart has artfully set the story in the context of the Revolution and relied upon her subject's friendships, especially with the Adamses. The pace is brisk, if not jaunty. But the

history is marred by small errors. The stamp tax was an internal, not an “external,” tax. Abigail Adams’s sisters were Mary Cranch and Elizabeth Shaw, not Elizabeth Cranch and Mary Shaw. And Stuart is too susceptible to conjecture, relying on qualifiers such as “may have” and “probably.”

All in all, Stuart does not satisfactorily support the exaggerated claim of the title, that Warren was the secret muse to the Revolution. But Warren’s intelligence, her erudition, her patriotism, her political commentary, her well-lived life, deserve attention. As a lively introduction to the great Mercy Otis Warren, this book is appealing. But to the student of history, Rosemarie Zagari’s *A Woman’s Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (1995) still stands as the best biography.

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## Making History

Reviewed by Martin Walker

IN THE 19TH CENTURY, AS history was transformed from a vocation to an academic profession, historians began to specialize. Constitutional and diplomatic historians; economic, social, and military specialists; and historians of ideas emerged, then philosophical schools. Some historians preferred the top-down view from the throne, others the bottom-up perspective from the gutter or the plow. But something was lost in the separation of history into these various specialties. Two recent books demonstrate just how fruitful it can be when scholars combine the findings and approaches of different academic disciplines.

In bringing economics into assessments of military history, Jurgen Brauer and Hubert van Tuyl

also bring illumination. Cost efficiency isn’t top of mind when we gaze on the ruins of some imposing medieval castle. But the analysis is clear. Kings and barons built castles because, however expensive, these fortifications were a great deal cheaper than the alternative of maintaining a large standing army. Moreover, castles provided a refuge for a suddenly vulnerable or beleaguered owner; standing armies, by contrast, often presented a threat to their commander. (The authors do not apply their calculus to non-Western armies, but the example of China’s Great Wall or medieval Arab fortifications suggest that similar factors may well have been at work.)

In our own day, the same analysis suggests that France developed nuclear weapons not simply to augment its prestige, but because doing so was cheaper than raising, training, and maintaining large conventional forces. Nuclear arsenals require a relatively high initial investment in science and technology (which can bring useful spinoffs to the wider economy), but thereafter tend to be cheaper to keep up than armored divisions and fleets of warships. In the 1960s, thanks in part to its nuclear weapons, France felt comfortable cutting 470,000 men from its armed forces.

Brauer and van Tuyl, who teach economics and history, respectively, at Augusta State University in Georgia, also turn their interdisciplinary lens on the mercenary arrangements of Renaissance Italy; the wars of Marlborough, Frederick the Great, and Napoleon; Grant’s campaigns in the Civil War; and the strategic bombings of World War II. The results are invariably stimulating. For example, in their analysis, the medieval drama of kings versus barons can be explained by the fact that, at the end of the 12th century in England, a basic stone keep could be built for £350 and a state-of-the-art version with curtain walls and gate houses for £1,000.

While the king’s income never fell below £10,000 a year, only seven barons drew more than £400, and the average was about £200. That is why it took an alliance of barons to force King John to sign the Magna Carta in 1215. Within another 200 years, the relative power of the monarchy increased again, as the castles of even the richest and strongest

### CASTLES, BATTLES, AND BOMBS: How Economics Explains Military History.

By Jurgen Brauer and  
Hubert van Tuyl.  
Univ. of Chicago Press.  
403 pp. \$29

### THE HORSE, THE WHEEL, AND LANGUAGE: How Bronze-Age Riders From the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World.

By David W. Anthony.  
Princeton Univ. Press.  
553 pp. \$35