



The Life and Times of Martha Laurens Ramsey, 1759-1811

Joanna Bowen Gillespie

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MARTHA LAURENS RAMSAY was one of few eighteenth-century southern women whose written records provide a window into her life, her experiences, and convictions. Using Martha Laurens Ramsay's spiritual diary and correspondence and investigating contemporary sources, Joanna Bowen Gillespie has crafted a contextual biography that reconstructs with compelling insights Ramsay's views on patriotism, household management, wifely affection, and personal autonomy. Young Martha's prominent family supported the Revolution's promises and struggled through its postwar uncertainties. During the American Revolution her father, Henry Laurens, was president of the Continental Congress. Martha's brother, John Laurens, was known for his military gallantry in the war and his controversial proposal that slaves help fight for American freedom. Her husband, David Ramsay of Charleston, was a physician, a patriot-politician, and one of the first historians of the American Revolution. From childhood onward Martha was strongly loyal to those men shaping her life circumstances. At the same time she was inwardly determined to make her individual mark, intellectually and spiritually. Her writings articulate a deep religious consciousness in all her decisions. Her highest ambition was to embody Christianity's ideals through all crises, including death, a conviction that characterized her entire approach to life, domestic and political. In this biographical reconstruction, Gillespie reveals a prominent, well-educated woman constructing her own identity during the exciting time when the new America was building its own character and institutions.

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