

# A Midwife's Tale: The Notes!

## Themes:

1. Diaries as History: Change the source material—change the historical story.
2. Domestic Life as History: Change the story—change the topics. Domestic (every day) life is important. Why not study it?
3. Health Care in the New Republic: Midwife (and women) as first tier health care providers. Doctors not entirely trustworthy nor particularly good at health care (opium for labor anyone?).
4. Religion in the NR: Religion permeated domestic life, but not everyone went to church. Notice Martha's views on God changed over time--
5. Sexuality in the NR: Pre-marital sex acceptable with caveats. Pregnancies required marriage, onus on the man for not marrying, not the woman for getting pregnant.
6. Pre-Industrial Labor: Little separation between the public and private spheres. Work (surveying/midwifery, etc) happened at home, not "at work" in town. Everyone worked, no retirement, no sick days. Local economies based on Barter, rather than currency.

## Myths Counter-Acted by the Midwife's Tale:

These Myths and others are often used by cultural conservatives to control behavior. These myths rely on our ignorance of the past and a fictional belief in the American Golden Age: a simpler time in the past when "we" were better.

1. **In the past there was a lot less rape:** The idea here is that modern women, by their behavior, have caused the violence against them and perhaps deserve it.
2. **There was a lot less domestic violence in the past:** Same as above, but with the added violence against children. That somehow in the past women, not focused on careers and money, was better parents. Kids and wives need to be beaten now, or so the myth goes, because of the "breakdown" in gender roles. How much violence against children is referred to in the video?
3. **In the past POLITICIANS were less corrupt:** Men were more moral in the past (maybe because women and people of color knew their place?), or so the myth goes. Jefferson? The Judge?
4. **There was a lot less premarital sex in the past—people were more sexually controlled.** This myth also serves to chastise women for sexual profligacy, but also takes men to task to some extent. Was there less sex, marital and premarital, in the past? Jonathon and Sally?
5. **People used to be more religious and went to church all the time—which of course made them better people.** Yet most of the founding fathers were either deists or atheists? Martha believed in what kind of God?
6. **In the past we took care of our elders, respected them and we all lived together, taking care of Gramma and Grampa.** Really? Is that how it worked for Martha? Remember the old "manwitches"? This myth also chastises modern women, suggesting we're too busy indulging ourselves to take care of the family old people in the home.