

## The Language of Coverture

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; and is . . . under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture. Upon this principle, of an union of person in husband and wife, depend almost all the legal rights, duties, and disabilities, that either of them acquire by the marriage. . . . [E]ven the disabilities which the wife lies under, are for the most part intended for her protection and benefit. So great a favourite is the female sex of the laws of England.



C. Schessele, *Mrs. John Adams (Abigail Smith)*, ca. 1775. Engraving. New-York Historical Society Library, PR 52.



Unknown artist, *Sir William Blackstone*, ca. 1755. Oil on canvas.  
National Portrait Gallery, London, Primary Collection, 388.