

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

JOHN FOSS, BARBARY CAPTIVITY, AND STRAINS OF
AMERICAN THOUGHT IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By
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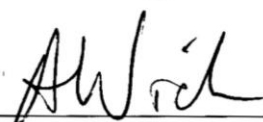
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This work is an attempt to draw out the ideological underpinnings of *A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss*, the 1798 captivity narrative of the Massachusetts sailor John Foss. This study undertakes to demonstrate how the *Journal* draws on motivating secular and religious thought to make sense of the “embarrassments” John Foss and his fellow American captives endured at the hands of their Muslim masters in Algiers. By identifying the American nation with the sufferers of biblical history, Foss mediated the weakness endemic to the United States in his time and appealed to an afflictive model of progress. This teleological model sustained the period’s rising “secular optimism,” and the *Journal*’s narrative binds the captive’s fate with that of the nation while demonstrating an important discursive use of Islam in the early United States.

The experiences in Algiers in the 1780s and 1790s made manifest many of the inadequacies of the American government, military, and social institutions in what Robert Allison has characterized as “a time of fear.” The roughly three-decade course of American Barbary captivity that culminated in Tripoli in the early nineteenth century, however, would transport the nation to an ideologically significant “time of triumph.”¹ This progression describes an arc resembling that followed by the English in the previous century. As Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar have written of seventeenth-century Britain, “the nightmare of captivity gave way to the dream of empire.”² John Foss’s *Journal* appeared at a critical juncture of a similar transition in the American relationship to the world of Islam. The severity of Foss’s abjection forced him to confront the modest exigencies of American identity in the early years of American independence. More important, however is that Foss also embraced the optimistic thrust of many American ideologies emerging at the time he wrote the *Journal*. Reconciling the two domains of real despondency and anticipated triumph required the *Journal* to accept seemingly contradictory notions of national weakness and strength. Foss clears this hurdle by embracing religiously inflected language that justified his and his nation’s humiliation as part of a dualistic progression. He did this in service of a belief that the American nation was fitted to play a special part in human history. Examining the sources and dimensions of these influences sheds light on a critical moment in American thought.

¹ Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xviii.

² Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1713* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 127.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss recounts the “hapless fate” of its eponymous author, an American sailor who sought “an honest livelihood” aboard a brig that sailed for Cadiz with a shipment of flour in the autumn of 1793. In place of opportunity, Foss found captivity. He and more than one hundred of his fellow jack tars were captured by corsairs and became “christian slaves” in Algiers. The youngest of these “mancipated” sailors attended the Algerian Dey and swept his palaces, while the men outfitted corsair ships in the harbor or performed hard labor for the regency. Loaded with the “galling chain,” these men—and all the Americans held captive in Algiers were male—endured “unexampled cruelty” as their scornful overseers treated them like beasts of burden, prodding them with spears “not unlike an ox-goad, among our farmers.” Toiling under the watchful eye of their taskmasters, they blasted 20-ton stones from the mountainside and dragged them on sledges to the marina, where they dumped them from pontoons to reinforce the harbor mole. As unwilling but critical moving parts in the “engine of inhuman barbarity,” the captives made possible the very seafaring that had led to their capture. Making matters worse was the Sisyphean nature of their labors, for “every gale of wind that comes washes [the stones] into deep water. After a gale they have as much need of them as they had the first hour after the mole was built. So we may conclude this is a work that will never be finished.”³

³ John Foss, *A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss ...*, second ed. (Newburyport: Angier March, 1798), 23.

As Ann Thomson has written with specific reference to Foss's *Journal*, eighteenth-century Barbary captivity literature tends to be "highly romanced."⁴ Indeed, Foss often turns to purple prose, and he lacks the clear-eyed reflection (and the bitter "self-applause") of his fellow captivity writer, the future American consul James Leander Cathcart. Although Foss's *Journal* has been largely dismissed as a reliable sourcebook on the experiences of Americans in Algiers, it may offer valuable and rare insight into dimensions of early American thought through its exploration of captivity and its depictions of Islam.

The *Journal* proceeds episodically and can be distilled into three principal sections addressing, respectively, Foss's capture, his reportage on Algiers, and his release. The early portions of this narrative set the stage for the captive's affliction and the attendant national humiliation. Following this narrative section are reports on the ethnography and history of Algiers, including large derivative passages that interpret Islam for an American audience. These passages sketch a portrait of Algerian defenses, agriculture, transportation, government, and—of course—Islam. Foss addresses American and Algerian identities, sharply distinguishing the former's virtues from the latter's vices. The Americans' noblesse is apparent despite their abjection, which stands in stark relief to the execrable character of the Algerians, namely their hatred of Christianity, superstition, lassitude, and corruption. In the third section, so-defined, Foss returns to his narrative and describes the diplomatic, moral, and religious triumph that occurred with the captives' redemption. As the American government worked to release

⁴ Ann Thomson, *Barbary and Enlightenment: European Attitudes towards the Maghreb in the 18th Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 6.

its captives, its efforts affirmed the ascendancy of the American nation, and the “merciless Barbarians ... viewed the American character ... in the most exalted light.”⁵

The arc of the captive’s individual story prefigures the trajectory of the American national project that began with the planting of the New World and continued through Foss’s day. By virtue of their probity, the weak and oppressed Americans endured their suffering, cast off the shackles of tyranny, and rose with dignity to claim their freedom. By embracing, rather than shying from the affliction inherent in this struggle, Foss’s *Journal* explores a crucial paradox that underlay the experience of the American Critical Period: although high-minded and convinced of their own moral superiority and the singularity of their national calling, these captives remained citizens of a weak nation lacking both a navy to protect its far-flung trade interests and the capability to realize its national ambitions. Foss’s account of his personal suffering and ultimate triumph draws on covenantal projections that parallel those expected for the American nation. Foss reconciles the humiliation of captivity by appealing to captives’ fortitude leading up to their glorious emancipation. In the same way, the beleaguered American nation pushed on with an overriding sense of national purpose that was divinely warranted and destined to be sown abroad.

This study examines the various influences that animated these themes in John Foss’s *Journal*. Among them, we suggest that a form of millennial expectation bridges the wide gap between Foss’s humiliating experiences and the hopes he nonetheless expressed for the American nation. This optimistic expectation fed the forward-leaning narrative of Foss’s account, which begins in abjection and culminates in personal and national triumph. This study will proceed over five chapters. Chapter I reviews the

⁵ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 123.

existing academic literature addressing American Barbary captivity and some of the major ideological influences acting on Foss. Chapter II defines the contours of the American relationship with Algiers, with particular emphasis on the weakness endemic to the United States at this time. It shall examine the political and social factors contributing to the humiliation Foss evokes. Chapter III examines the question of captivity and its discursive relationship to American slavery, with special attention given to instances in which the paradigms overlapped in political discourse and the captivity literature. Chapter IV homes in on the religious influences that informed American thought at the end of the eighteenth century. This chapter shall explore the particularly meaningful evocations of ancient Israel and the optimism inspired by millennial thought while suggesting that a form of “republican eschatology” placed the American nation itself in a critical position within ascendant millennial schemes. Finally, Chapter V analyzes the specific challenges to personal identity that Foss encountered in Algiers, with special emphasis on the way Foss contrasts those with his idealized vision of American life. This chapter shall identify Foss as an interlocutor in the paradigms of religious and political ideology examined in the preceding chapters. Particular care will be given to an exploration of the influences acting upon Foss in the hope of explicating how Foss constructed his experiences in Algiers to make sense of the American place in a world witnessing portentous changes.

* * *

A. Literature on Barbary captivity

To the extent that American Barbary captivity drew the attention of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars, it attracted many whose interests lay in naval and diplomatic affairs. These scholars often emphasized the governmental aspects of American involvement in North Africa to the exclusion of the religious, cultural, and literary products of captivity. In the foreword to the U.S. Navy's official compendium of records related to Barbary affairs, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt explained that the experiences of Algiers and Tripoli furnished Americans with "permanently valuable lessons" about naval armament, economics, politics, law, and "dealing with aggressor countries." Roosevelt suggested the history of American actions in the Maghrib brought "into clearer light the rugged determination of our forefathers that the national independence and just rights of the United States, especially on the great neutral highways of the sea, should be duly respected."⁶ He said nothing of the interactions' cultural effects at home or abroad. Outsized emphasis on such governmental elements defined the general parameters of scholarship on American Barbary encounters through the twentieth century.

Scholars, journalists, and public intellectuals writing in the twenty-first century, however, have shifted their focus to religion and intellectual history in studies that have been, as one commentator noted, "largely occasioned by America's latest round of confrontation in the Middle East."⁷ Many such studies approach the Barbary crises as the opening salvo in a long-running conflict between the United States and Islam. As

⁶ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, foreword to *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with Barbary Powers*, ed. Dudley W. Knox, vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939), iii.

⁷ Christopher Hitchens, "Jefferson Versus the Muslim Pirates," *City Journal*, Spring 2007, <http://www.city-journal.org/html/17_2_urbanities-thomas_jefferson.html?sr=show>.

such, these works often employ terminology borrowed from present-day religio-political contexts, and the contemporary lens has framed the experiences of North Africa as an analogue to a host of contemporary issues. Thus, the Barbary Wars are said to provide a roadmap for battling modern Somali piracy.⁸ Or we read in terms reminiscent of the Iranian Revolution that the capture of the *Maria* and the *Dauphin* by Algerian corsairs in 1785 precipitated a “substantial hostage crisis.”⁹ We are told that North African piracy had roots in the “glory of jihad,” and “just as the concept of jihad is invoked by Muslim terrorists today to legitimize and permit suicide bombings of noncombatants for political gain, so too al-jihad fi’l-bahr served as the cornerstone of the Barbary States’ interaction with Christendom.”¹⁰ In some views, the complex web of economic incentives that underwrote privateering is cast aside as Barbary captivity and its European analogue are reduced to “faith slavery.”¹¹ Works that predate and avoid such considerations bear out other shortcomings. One frequently cited early diplomatic history explains that complicating relations between the United States and “the Mohammedan world . . . was the fact that the millennium-old conflict between Christians and Mohammedans could not easily be forgotten.”¹² Another history declares that the rough crescent shape of “Barbary” is appropriate, “for it is all Islamic,” while

⁸ Adrian Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary: Corsairs, Conquests, and Captivity in the 17th-Century Mediterranean* (New York, Riverhead Books: 2010).

⁹ Joshua E. London, *Victory in Tripoli: How America’s War with the Barbary Pirates Established the U.S. Navy and Built a Nation* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹ Robert C. Davis, *Holy War and Human Bondage: Tales of Christian-Muslim Slavery in the Early-Modern Mediterranean* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2009), vii.

¹² Ray W. Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers: 1776-1816* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press: 1931), 3.

the courts of its governing “military adventurers . . . were sinks of corruption, where violence was a tradition, conspiracy and treachery a sport.”¹³

Despite the renewed current interest in American contact with North African Muslims in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Paul Baepler suggests “the Barbary captivity narrative has been overlooked and its importance greatly underestimated.”¹⁴ The Barbary captivity account is an exploration of early American identity that Baepler suggests is inextricably linked to the narratives of the antebellum slave and the Indian captive. All three forms address identities of captivity that resonated with an American public that perceived of British rule in similar terms. The Barbary captivity accounts of the 1790s and early 1800s demonstrate a keenly felt vulnerability among the American sailors whose livelihoods exposed them to hazard in the eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean. Much like the early New England colonist, the post-Revolution sailor faced the threat of captivity as a real and immanent dimension of his daily experience. Yet by the nineteenth century the conditions instantiating both Indian and Barbary captivity had begun to change as expansion on the western frontier further marginalized Native Americans, while growing American naval strength, European colonialism, and gunboat diplomacy subjugated the peoples of North Africa.¹⁵

The shifting dimensions of American religious belief wrought other changes on the captivity narrative. Unlike the Puritan captive of the colonial era, the post-

¹³ Donald Barr Chidsey, *The Wars in Barbary: Arab Piracy and the Birth of the United States Navy* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), 1-2.

¹⁴ Paul Baepler, “The Barbary Captivity Narrative in American Culture,” *Early American Literature* 39 (2004), 222.

¹⁵ The intertextuality of various captivity forms is evident in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for example, when the runaway slave George draws on Indian captivity to illustrate the justness of his flight to Canada: “I wonder, Mr. Wilson, if the Indians should come and take you a prisoner away from your wife and children, and want to keep you all your life hoeing corn for them . . . you’d think the first stray horse you could find an indication of Providence—shouldn’t you?” Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 2013 ed., e-book.

Revolution Barbary captive does not view his condition as the just and moralizing instruction of God, nor does he attribute his ultimate deliverance to divine intervention. The Barbary captivity accounts of the 1790s do not retain the religiously didactic core essential to their predecessors, the accounts of both early English Barbary and Indian captivity. American Barbary captivity accounts are, rather, heavily romanticized, and the captives of the early nineteenth century display their superior cultivation by observing natural beauty in their uncivilized surroundings or by pointing out the decrepitude of North African society and its shameful decay. The American Barbary captive sees his station as a reflection of geopolitical causes.¹⁶ Writ large, the independent American relationship with Islam followed the arc described by the English relationship in the preceding centuries. Whereas England had once been forced to contend with the domains of Islam from inferior standing, mounting naval and commercial power ultimately permitted Englishmen and later Britons to dictate the terms of this relationship. Thus, realpolitik tilted in favor the Europeans, and by the end of the seventeenth century Muslims themselves no longer held the brush depicting them in the English imagination. Instead, a discursively flexible figure had displaced the once-forbidding specter of Islam.¹⁷

A similar discursive shift enabled Americans to freely reinterpret the religiously inflected experiences of North Africa in a way that provided the framework for erecting grand expansionist views. In *U.S. Orientalisms*, Malini Johar Schueller argues that early American literary constructions of multiple and flexible “imaginary Orients” met the needs of a national discourse regarding race, nationalism, and empire. As viewed by

¹⁶ Paul Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 40.

¹⁷ Nabil Matar, *Britain and Barbary: 1589-1689* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005), 167-72.

some Americans, the Orient became the “new frontier against which the United States—variously represented as Columbia, Libertad, or Atlas, but always powerful and whole—could define itself in terms of virtue and world mission.”¹⁸ American orientalism therefore did not merely parrot a set of inherited British approaches to the East; rather, it constituted a means of conceptualizing the Orient as it “naturalized the idea” of ideologically based national expansion.¹⁹

Regardless of its domestic improvements and internal political progress, the United States remained endemically weak in the broader Atlantic context throughout the eighteenth century. Kariann Yokota has written that in the wake of the Revolution, “elite white Americans attempted to address their relative powerlessness within the transatlantic context through various strategies of internal domination.” Expressions of power came through the exploitation of slave labor, appropriation of western territory, and the dispossession and disenfranchisement of minorities.²⁰ One area in which early nineteenth-century Americans were able to begin externalizing was North Africa. Timothy Marr has explored the particular ways in which early Americans refashioned orientalist imagery in order to shore up centrifugal American ideology. Terming this outward-looking cooption of themes loosely distilled from Islam as “islamicism,” Marr posits that Americans molded Islam into a romanticized and gendered projection establishing worldliness and high cultivation. As Marr explains, American “islamicist

¹⁸ Malini Johar Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰ Kariann Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 18.

imaginations transformed the alien threat of Islamic difference into indigenous cultural capital that worked in complex ways to universalize American practices.”²¹

The United States’ passage from vulnerability to a position from which it could physically and imaginatively dominate Islam via the Barbary States continued into the early nineteenth century. Over the course of decades, the slow national maturation raised a host of issues with political and religious importance. Not only did American vulnerability in the face of North African privateers cast a pall over the nation’s economic prospects and its military capability, it also called into question the effectiveness of the federal government and the wisdom of the Revolution. Now suffering from absence of naval protection for commercial shipping following the breach with Britain, some captives felt they were “victims of American Independence.”²² Captivity during the 1780s and 1790s also coincided with a period of feckless American diplomacy, which further derogated American ambitions. These issues arose at a critical time during which an American identity was crystallizing. Because the American state had preceded the American nation, a people lacking a common past found a new nationalism as a “literary creation” and to some extent a “contrived memory.”²³

The literary vehicle of the American Barbary captivity narrative emerges in this context to provide what Jacob Rama Berman calls a “symbolic figuration” that ameliorated the shortcomings between the loftiness of the “American promise” and

²¹ Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9-10.

²² James Leander Cathcart, *The Captives*, compiled by Jane B. Newkirk (La Porte, IN: Herald Print, 1899), 145.

²³ Henry Steele Commanger, *The Search for a Usable Past And Other Essays in Historiography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 25.

many Americans' actual experiences.²⁴ Berman calls such figurative projections “arabesque.” Among the critical arabesques of the early United States were the experiences in North Africa, which provided an “integral semantic space” in which Americans expressed and defined their values and national identity.²⁵ The Barbary captivity account may also have assured its American readers of the ultimate cogency and rectitude of their national project. In his analysis of imaginative American usages of the Islam, Marr has suggested that John Foss’s *Journal* “expresses the triumph of liberty over despotism by celebrating the survival of his democratic voice as a symbol of the power of a nation that refused to allow its sailors to languish in suffering enslavement.”²⁶ (That symbolic power remained, perhaps, despite the fact that some sailors were forced to “languish in suffering enslavement” for eleven years.)

B. Literature on American religious ideologies

In addition to its patent political deployments, the American Barbary captivity narrative also gave a platform to moot powerful religious questions such as the theodicy that arose as a result of subjugation at the hands of Muslims. Recent studies have begun to recognize the particular interplay between American Barbary captivity and the religious dynamics of the post-Revolution United States. Charles Adams has described the Barbary captivity narrative as “orientalist drama: a contest between Christian civilization and Moslem barbarity ... cut from the pattern of Christ's captivity and torment. Innocent Christian victims—sailors, soldiers, passengers on ships going about their business—are unlawfully seized by Moslem pirates.” John Foss, for one, used

²⁴ Jacob Rama Berman, *American Arabesque: Arabs and Islam in the Nineteenth Century Imaginary* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁶ Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 54.

precisely this rhetoric. By recasting his harsh sufferings as a “morality play,” the captive “martyr” details his sufferings yet maintains his “moral integrity.” Resisting the allurements of apostasy, the captive is “finally redeemed because of a superior faith and commitment to the values of a superior civilization.”²⁷ With particular reference to Foss, Thomas Kidd has observed the connection between the Barbary captivity as a “spiritual battle” complete with “religiously inspired persecution” and a particular view of American ascendancy and religio-political determination. Quoting Foss’s *Journal*, Kidd notes that many eighteenth-century Americans believed the North African privateers “were ‘genuine children of Ishmael,’ given to violence against God’s chosen people.”²⁸ A belief that Providence had specially selected the American nation (lineally descended from Isaac—as opposed to Ishmael) for a key role in the consummation of human history can be traced to colonial times, but it operated powerfully upon the minds of many Americans in the late eighteenth century. As pastor Abiel Abbot remarked in 1799, “‘OUR AMERICAN ISRAEL,’ is a term frequently used; and common consent allows it apt and proper.”²⁹

To the extent that Americans conceived of any national project on the scale of empire or ideological expansion, the influence of a hegemonic religious undercurrent is often evident. Modes of thought that explored America’s place in the world as a function of the nation’s special selection as “God’s American Israel” often contained special eschatological objectives. Eschatological forms rising in the United States following the Revolution laid bare the future of the American nation and sometimes the

²⁷ Charles Adams, ed., *The Narrative of Robert Adams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xlvi.

²⁸ Thomas Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims from the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 22.

²⁹ Abiel Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance in the People of the United States of America to Ancient Israel* (Haverhill: Moore & Stebbins, 1799), 6.

United States itself, but they also answered to important questions of human suffering. Through interpretation and prophecy related to the End Times, Americans, like other Christians before them, found the “light of prophecy” acting as “God’s index finger pointing the way out for a world engulfed in growing confusion, disillusionment, and despair.”³⁰ The United States observed the portentous new eschatological form in the 1790s, a time when Americans like the Barbary captives continued to find value in what James West Davidson has called an “afflictive model of progress.”³¹

In making sense of the suffering the captives endured, John Foss’s *Journal* shows the influence of the new ideological forms taking hold of many Americans in the 1790s. Some scholarship has treated biblical prophecy as little more than a reflection of the political and emotional orientation of the prophetic interpreters, yet interpretation is not merely epiphenomenal of underlying social anxieties. James West Davidson has argued that although it is tempting to treat millennial thought like a Rorschach inkblot, such eschatology cannot be read as an amorphous form sufficiently vague to take on any meaning expositors might load on it. Rather, eschatology enjoys a push-pull relationship by explaining “existing social realities” while bending “those social realities into line with the situations it predicted.”³² In this scheme of influence, eschatological thought did perform a crucial discursive function by translating “political ideas into moral imperatives,” but the relationship was not unidirectional.³³ Religious thought drew energy from crises such as the American experiences of the 1790s, while fanning the flames itself.

³⁰ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers: The Historical Development of the Prophetic Interpretation*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946-54), 15-16.

³¹ James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 270-71.

³² *Ibid.*, 258-59.

³³ *Ibid.*, 215.

Scholars no longer accept that by the 1790s the dark sobriety of apocalyptic eschatology had been all but supplanted by cheerful and forward-looking postmillennialism. Ruth Bloch perceives the relative view of many American millennial schemes (particularly postmillennial ones) as a handmaiden to revolution and the optimistic attitudes of the late eighteenth century, yet Bloch cautions that such optimism was far from universal, and the gap between pre- and postmillennial ideology was not the only dividing line observable in 1790s eschatology.³⁴ Like Davidson, Bloch emphasizes that some preachers and lay interpreters of the 1790s viewed the End Times with renewed focus on Armageddon, rather than the bliss of the millennium. Many also spurned patently political considerations in favor of minute exegetical interpretation, while some attempted to “refocus American millennial aspirations on a broader, providential and world-historical plane.”³⁵ For all its variety, 1790s eschatological thought freighted many political implications, yet outward-looking prophecy represented a broadening of national horizons that sought to more accurately locate the United States’ place in the world.³⁶

Many Americans—including at least two prominent diplomats in Algiers and John Foss himself—believed the United States was fated to extend its putatively benevolent influence outside its North American borders. The discursive tools of Christian eschatology permitted Americans to set their sights on ambitious national projects, yet these projects were not easily reconciled with the challenges posed by clear and present threats such as the privateers of North Africa. Despite technical, commercial, and economic growth in the eighteenth century, Islam remained, as it had

³⁴ See: Ruth Bloch, “The Social and Political Base of Millennial Literature in Late Eighteenth-Century America,” *American Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1988).

³⁵ Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought 1756-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 148.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 150-51.

for England in much of the seventeenth century, an opposing force that could not be controlled, dominated, or dismissed. Nabil Matar has written that eventual military and political ascendancy permitted England to disengage with Islam in real terms, and the Muslim became an increasingly “dogmatic image” relegated to religious deployments. Thus, by the turn of the eighteenth century, Muslims had become “a fabrication ... even when they were ‘real’ enough to be killed by the British cavalry.”³⁷

In the American Federalist Period, however, Islam retained some menacing power despite the relative safety guaranteed by the United States’ remote geography. By the turn of the century, images of Islam could not yet be entirely fabricated. Religious imagery therefore became an important referent for a host of political and nationalist causes as religious and secular forms merged in a fluid reciprocal relationship. The contact with Barbary corsairs furnished Americans with images of Islam they could redeploy for patently political purposes, especially in usages related to the secular millennialism. The poetry of Joel Barlow, an American diplomat in Algiers, evinces the belief that the United States existed as a singular nation specially deputized by God to enlighten the benighted world, and the experiences of captivity in Algiers had left some Americans with a view that North Africa was unique among the world in its need for enlightenment. Ernest Tuveson has interpreted diplomat David Humphreys’ view of the American mission in Algiers as an important event in the “apocalyptic timetable,” while Federalists in particular viewed the “United States as a pioneer of world utopia.”³⁸ This anticipation of the unprecedented nation’s benign expansion shares a common genealogy with later thought regarding Manifest Destiny, as both maintained roots in

³⁷ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Edinburgh: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 14; 184-87.

³⁸ Ernest Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 120.

the earliest planting of the New World.³⁹ As Thomas Kidd has observed, whatever its source, the tradition of Christian eschatology became an important building block of American political ideology.⁴⁰

In the post-Revolution United States, these religious currents took on surprising new forms. Nathan Hatch has observed that American “civil millennialism” reoriented apocalyptic rhetoric to a secular discourse; thus, “the ultimate goal of apocalyptic hope—the conversion of all nations to Christianity—became diluted with, and often subordinate to, the commitment to America as a new seat of liberty.” This scheme took the United States as a model for the prosperous millennial kingdom, and like the millennial kingdom in patently religious deployments, its singular glories could not be localized.⁴¹ In Hatch’s view, the phenomenon of a secularized eschatology reframed “the struggle of liberty versus tyranny” as “the conflict between heaven and hell.” With it, clergymen “translated” their cause into terms articulated by the establishment of Christ’s kingdom.⁴²

Religious language played an important role in American rhetoric, in which church and state functioned as mutually supporting pillars of society. Robert Bellah has observed that in the United States covenantal fulfillment created a religiously inflected discourse that became “genuinely American and genuinely new,” complete with its own prophets, martyrs, and sacred places and rituals. This “civil religion” dictated “that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and

³⁹ Fuad Sha’ban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: Roots of Orientalism in America* (Durham, Acorn Press, 1991), 17-18.

⁴⁰ Thomas Kidd, “Is it Worse to Follow Mahomet than the Devil?” *Church History* 72 (2003), 786-89.

⁴¹ Nathan O. Hatch “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 31 (1974), 409.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 430.

a light to all the nations.”⁴³ Bellah calls special attention to the responsibility implied by this covenant, and the providential direction of American mythology rested upon a national confidence in the ethical telos of the American destiny. Of course, the United States did not maintain a monopoly on “chosenness.” Richard Niebuhr has observed the similarity of these American views with myriad other beliefs of national selection, including German race mythology, the French democratic mission, and “the modern Russian gospel of world saviorhood.” All of them mediated “intellectual doubt,” “criticisms of the self,” and the disillusionment caused by suffering. Yet according to Niebuhr, the American “overbelief” that the “kingdom of God in America” was the “American kingdom of God . . . represents not so much the impact of the gospel upon the New World as the use and adaptation of the gospel by the new society for its own purposes.”⁴⁴ While the confluence of these competing interpretations of American institutional and religious power structures and discourse is dizzyingly entangled, their variety and commonness attest to the importance of religious thought even in the putatively secularized discourse of the late eighteenth-century United States.

⁴³ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America.” *Daedalus* 96 (1967), 18.

⁴⁴ Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper, 1959), 8-12.

CHAPTER II

THE ALGERIAN ROOTS OF EARLY AMERICAN HUMILIATION

Barbarie and chiefly therein Algier, [is] the whip of the Christian World, the wall of the Barbarian, terror of Europe, the bridle of both Hesperias (Italy and Spaine) Scourge of the Ilands, Den of Pyrates, Theatre of all crueltie, and Sanctuarie of Iniquitie ...⁴⁵

During the so-called Critical Period that stretched from the end of the Revolution to the ratification of the Constitution in 1787, Americans fairly stooped in humiliation before the Barbary states. The capture of American vessels and sailors by corsairs belonging to these states precipitated a crisis in the national consciousness over its effects on commerce and the safety of Americans on the seas and in major ports. Not only did piracy threaten to derail the international trade on American manufactures and raw goods, it also cast doubt on the lasting effects of the Revolution itself. The federal government proved itself incapable of safeguarding trade by presenting a naval deterrent as larger European powers did, or by securing expensive peace treaties in the manner of the smaller nations of Europe. Moreover, the fact that some captured sailors languished more than a decade in Algiers cast the fledgling American government in an embarrassingly pallid light. As sailors wasted away in the *bagnios* of Algiers, some lamented that they had become victims of a revolution that robbed them of the aegis provided by a strong government capable of advancing the interests of its people.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ *Purchas His Pilgrimes: Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and others*, vol. 9 (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1905), 278.

⁴⁶ With his 1888 survey *The Critical Period of American History*, John Fiske gave lasting economy to the notion that the years immediately following the American Revolution witnessed “germinal events” and presented choices related to the “tremendous alternatives of future welfare or misery for mankind.” John Fiske, *The Critical Period of American History* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1888), preface.

The capture of two American vessels by Algerian privateers in 1785 alarmingly demonstrated this vulnerability, while a second wave of captures in 1793 further stoked these fears. Shipping and insurances rates for the vital trade with the Iberian Peninsula jumped markedly, hampering American efforts to corner the shipping market as a neutral carrier for politically charged Europe. Meanwhile, Americans feared the absence of a robust response to North African piracy would embolden corsairs to attack ill-defended American harbors. The most visible governmental efforts in response to the corsair threat came in the form of vacillation and failed diplomacy. The nation lacked a diplomatic corps capable of striking agreeable treaties to prevent piracy, and complicating matters further was the nation's endemic penury that foreclosed any possibility of meeting those treaty obligations. Despite its own economic and military weaknesses, Algiers brought the United States to heel. The humiliation and subjection of this relationship reveal the disaffecting exigencies of the United States' place in the world in the years following the Revolution, when Americans were distressingly aware of their station. It was clear to "every rational American," one British account reported, that Barbary piracy revealed just how far the "miseries of independence" fell short of their "promised greatness."⁴⁷

A. America's 'late separation and present weakness'

Two years after the Treaty of Paris officially ended the American Revolution, the Congress of the Confederation stocked its gaping coffers by selling off the *Alliance*, the last remaining frigate of the Continental Navy. Although some in Congress advocated for the nation to maintain a fleet to guard "its trade and coasts from the

⁴⁷ "London," *Times* (London) 13 October 1786.

insults of pirates,” fiscal belt-tightening carried the day. History had demonstrated the “monstrous expense” of outfitting a navy, and Congress could not afford to pretend to deterrence.⁴⁸ No warships would sail under American colors for another twelve years, during which time American sailors and merchants became the unwitting targets of corsairs sailing from North African ports.

Known to the West as the Barbary States, independent Morocco and the three Ottoman states of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli cast a pall over the sea trade of the newly independent United States. This specter looming over American commerce grants insight into American self-assessment in the wake of the Revolution, for in light of the actual state of North African forces in the late eighteenth century, American fears of raids from across the Atlantic are unjustifiably maudlin. Numerous contemporary reports and captivity accounts testify to the weakness of the respective fleets. Thomas Jefferson reported to Congress that the few vessels belonging of Algiers were “sharp built and swift, but so light as not to stand the broadside of a good frigate. Their guns are of different calibres, unskilfully pointed and worked. The vessels illy manoeuvred, but crowded with men—one third Turks, the rest Moors.” Of the fleet, “it is said they were never known to act together in any instance.”⁴⁹ The House of Representatives later heard that Algiers’ fleet amounted to 282 guns on aging, slender vessels “principally manned with people little accustomed to the management of large ships.”⁵⁰ By the late eighteenth century, the leaders of the Barbary states lacked the civil and political infrastructure to “ameliorate the people’s suffering, to reduce the danger of recurrent plagues and famines, to carve roads and put in place the foundations of national

⁴⁸ Nathan Miller, *The U.S. Navy: A History*, 3rd ed. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 33.

⁴⁹ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 22-26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

industry, to improve agriculture, or to marshal armies to resist raids and European occupation.” They had one but industry, that “of looting and plunder on the open sea,” and even that capability had grown limited.⁵¹ Nonetheless, the logistics of corsair attacks permitted even the relatively weak Barbary states to capitalize on American weakness during this period, and they deftly exploited the Americans’ “late separation and present weakness.”⁵²

The palpable threat of piracy and attacks on the American mainland was occasioned not only by the success of the Revolution, but also by a diplomatic falling-out with France. Although the outbreak of the Revolution had deprived American merchantmen of the Royal Navy’s protection, the 1778 Franco-American Treaty of Amity and Commerce had provided American shipping with French protection “against all violence, insult, attacks, or depredations on the part of said Princes and States of Barbary, or their subjects.”⁵³ Although this safeguarded the war effort in which France itself had a vested interest, the independent United States could not secure the same guaranty in peacetime. Independent American ships could no longer sail as clients of imperial naval strength.

Moroccan privateers seized the merchantman *Betsey* in October 1784, becoming the first North African nation to seize an independent American vessel. Emperor Sidi Muhammad bin Abdullah was apparently “piqued” at continued

⁵¹ Isma’īl al-‘Arabī, introduction to *Al-‘liqat al-Diblūmasīyah bayna Duwal al-Maghrib wa al-Wilāyāt al-Mutaḥidah: 1776-1816* (Algiers: Al-Sharika al-Watanīa liInshar wa-altuzī‘, 1978), 14-15.

⁵² *History of the War between the United States and Tripoli* (Salem: Salem Gazette Office, 1806), 3. After an audience with the Dey in 1799, an indignant William Eaton fulminated, “Can any man believe that this elevated brute has seven kings of Europe, two republics, and a continent tributary to him, when his whole naval force is not equal to two line of battle ships? It is so!” William Eaton, *The Life of the Late Gen. William Eaton*, ed. Charles Prentiss (Brookfield: E. Merriam & Co., 1813), 59-60.

⁵³ Act of February 6, 1778, *American States Papers: Statutes*, 1:12-31.

diplomatic snubbing years after he had recognized American independence and granted safe harbor and most-favored-nation status to American ships in December 1777, months before the French did likewise. Capturing the *Betsey*, however, may have signaled Sidi Muhammad's desire for diplomatic attention rather than a souring of his genial inclination toward the United States. The Emperor barred the crew from being enslaved and the cargo from being sold, and he released the ship with little to-do in 1785 following the "friendly interposition of the court of Madrid."⁵⁴ Another year would pass before the American agent Thomas Barclay arrived in Morocco to treat with the Emperor, bringing with him douceurs amounting to some \$20,000. Sidi acceded to a treaty that contained no stipulation for tribute payment, and which established a generally durable relationship between the two nations.⁵⁵ By the late eighteenth century, Morocco maintained the weakest fleet of the Barbary states, and in light of later negotiations in Algiers, the *Betsey* affair was a bauble.

That became apparent when Algerian corsairs captured the American vessels *Maria* and *Dauphin* in 1785. These seizures amplified pressure for the Americans to sign treaties with the North African regencies then loosely aligned with the Sublime Porte. The capture of the ships precipitated the worst nightmare of commercially minded Americans when it "spread an alarm among the American merchants and mariners, [and] raised the price of insurance."⁵⁶ Unfounded reports that large numbers of American vessels had been captured swirled in major seaports. Benjamin Franklin's correspondents amusedly wrote to him after reading in newspaper reports that "you have been taken by the Algerines, while others pretend that you are at Morocco,

⁵⁴ *NDWBP*, 22-26.

⁵⁵ Richard Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary: A Diplomatic History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004) 40 and 48.

⁵⁶ *The Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States of America ...*, vol. 1 (Washington: Blair & Rives, 1837), 568-69.

enduring your slavery with all the patience of a philosopher.”⁵⁷ Although such rumors were baseless, the perceived threat of corsair attacks on U.S.-flagged vessels grew so dire that when John Jay was preparing to travel to Britain, Alexander Hamilton mulled whether “it may not be advisable to procure a foreign vessel” for the journey.⁵⁸

Perhaps not without some merit, Americans pinned their commercial woes on Britain. The British were commonly accused of promoting attacks on unprotected American merchantmen in order to force American vessels to engage costly European escorts or forsake any commercial advantage by traveling in inconvenient groups. Many Americans did suspect the British had “encouraged” the Algerians to prey upon American ships, and Franklin noted the maxim of London merchants that “*if there were no Algiers it would be worth England’s while to build one.*”⁵⁹ The commercial stakes were high. One congressman suggested in 1794 that with imports and exports totaling \$20 million apiece, the United States should brace for an annual loss of no less than \$2 million in insurance due to Barbary piracy. The issue arose because American vessels bound for the Mediterranean depended for access upon the five-league-wide chokepoint of the Strait of Gibraltar, from which corsairs assumed “a safe and commanding position.”⁶⁰

Ports on all sides of the Iberian Peninsula were important destinations for American raw goods, and ten of the eleven American vessels captured and brought to Algiers in 1793 were sailing to or from Spain or Portugal. The captive Richard O’Brien and some in Congress later speculated that insurance rates would climb to 25 percent for

⁵⁷ “Universal Register,” *Times* (London) 19 September 1785; Jared Sparks, *Works of Franklin* (1840), quoted in: Charles Sumner, *White Slavery in the Barbary States* (Cleveland: John P. Jewett, 1853), 71.

⁵⁸ Michael Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 34.

⁵⁹ *American State Papers: Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence* 6:587.

⁶⁰ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 23.

ships bound for such ports and passing within striking distance of North Africa.⁶¹ As American vessels lost their appeal as inexpensive neutral carriers, O'Brien accused the British of gamesmanship to "make the danger appear greater than it really is, by which means the American bottoms are insured at a very high rate."⁶² Though perhaps overly zealous in assigning blame, one Newburyport newspaper reported that the plague threatening the Americans held in Algiers would "leave scarcely a wreck behind—Thanks to the British—This terrible scourge has been inflicted by their deep and crooked policy."⁶³ Not content with maligning Britain alone, James Leander Cathcart laid some blame at the feet of the French, suggesting they were slow to help the Americans obtain a treaty because they wanted to maintain "an undivided commerce" in North Africa.⁶⁴

B. The Mediterranean uncorked

Despite the unease over maritime predation, North African privateers captured no additional American ships between 1785 and the autumn of 1793. Meantime, Atlantic seaports continued to attract American trade in fish, rice, tobacco, corn, figs, indigo, and flour. It was reported that "the flag of the United States waved in every sea, and the ocean was covered with her ships. Enterprising and indefatigable, her merchants and traders sought wealth in the remotest climes."⁶⁵ The geography of the eastern Atlantic facilitated this expansive trade. Morocco, which controlled a large band of the northwest Africa and maintained the easiest access to the eastern Atlantic of all the Barbary states, was positively disposed toward the Americans, and although treaties

⁶¹ "Extract of a Letter from a Sea Captain," *New-York Morning Post*, 10 February 1787.

⁶² *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 435.

⁶³ *Morning Star* (Newburyport), Nov. 12, 1795.

⁶⁴ Cathcart, *The Captives*, 32-33.

⁶⁵ *History of the War between the United States and Tripoli*, 3.

with the nominally Ottoman Barbary regencies had not materialized due to American diplomatic blundering, Portuguese patrols intended to protect vessels sailing between Iberia and Brazil prevented privateers from the Mediterranean powers of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli from cruising the Atlantic.⁶⁶ When British Consul Charles Logie brokered a truce between Portugal and Algiers in 1793, however, the Strait of Gibraltar was suddenly uncorked, and privateers set out for the eastern Atlantic before word of the truce could reach vessels departing from American ports. Unaware of the fresh danger that awaited them, eleven American merchantmen were captured in the period of a few weeks in October and November 1793. Among them was the brig *Polly* on which the mariner John Foss had sailed from the United States. The corsair's master, "Rais Hudga Mahomet Salamia," advised Foss and the other crewmen that Algiers and Portugal would soon strike a permanent treaty, then "the Algerines would cruise in the Atlantic when they thought proper."⁶⁷

As the architect of the truce that had been responsible for seeing some 100 Americans led in chains to the bagnios of Algiers, the Briton Charles Logie attracted a great deal of American angst. Fueling American suspicions of Logie was the fact that upon learning the specifics of the truce, the Portuguese quickly renounced it and rejected any proposed treaty. Many concluded that Logie, who had negotiated the deal without the imprimatur of London, had undertaken the effort purely to punish the United States. James Leander Cathcart, who was captured in 1785, reported that Logie had earlier "wished [the Algerians] success in their attempts to capture those who refused allegiance to his Master." Perhaps just as galling to Cathcart was that Logie had reported to Dey Hasan Bashaw that Americans were "a set of beings without strength or

⁶⁶ Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 74-79.

⁶⁷ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 11-12.

resources, and so contemptible that his Master did not think us worth the trouble or expense of subduing.”⁶⁸ With national pride at stake, Richard O’Brien and four other American captives who became servants to the British consul complained that he treated them “very contemptuously.”⁶⁹ Comporting with the thrust of American assessments of Logie, the French consul recalled that the Briton “would have sold his God and country to the Algerines if he could have derived some benefit to his fortune and his credit.”⁷⁰ For his part, Dey Hasan resented being wielded as a cudgel in British policy toward the United States, and he upbraided King George over the Portuguese truce. Hasan bristled at his being used to exact “Revenge ... on Yours and our Enemies the Americans in the open seas by harassing and destroying them in such a manner as to reduce them to necessity of submitting to be your subjects again. The utility of this was far more for your convenience than ours.”⁷¹

These inauspicious events spurred Congress to resurrect the navy in 1794. Debate over the Naval Act, which launched American warships three years later, suggests that Americans feared they were commercially and bodily vulnerable. Although these discussions often reduced the Barbary states to pawns of the European powers, North African piracy remained a corporate threat to independent Americans. After a long and bruising war with against the British, some congressmen assumed a cautious posture toward North African forces, which retained their potency despite a prominent War Department report attesting to their decrepitude. The Virginia Congressman John Nicholas “feared that we were not a match for the Algerines,” who

⁶⁸ Cathcart, *The Captives*, 4.

⁶⁹ “Extract of a Letter from a Sea Captain,” *New-York Morning Post*, 10 February 1787.

⁷⁰ Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 231-32.

could outfit a vessel with only a few men from among their “innumerable” militia.⁷² William Branch Giles protested against engaging the Algerians because they “were a warlike people, accustomed to naval enterprises” and could marshal 100,000 fighters. He wondered how a small defensive force could withstand the “invincible militia of Algiers.”⁷³ If pirates did not sink American commerce, Connecticut Congressman Zephaniah Swift worried that the costs of building a navy to suppress them would. Just as Britain and France had come to near ruin through naval debts, building frigates to fight Algiers would saddle the United States with insurmountable debt. The issue was moot, however, as the American nation was “not fit for war.”⁷⁴

Magnifying the specter of piracy were diplomatic cables and newspaper reports attesting to occasions in which Muslims did pierce the veil of the New World. After Algerian corsairs captured eleven American vessels in late 1793, the American minister in Lisbon, David Humphreys, wrote to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson “that there is but too much reason to fear, the corsairs ... will infest the channel of England, and even the coasts of America.”⁷⁵ The same year, a letter written by “an American at Algiers, to his brother” raised the alarm over the startling fleet of “five ships, two brigs, and four searbacks, mounting from forty-four to twenty-two guns, all of which are now in port, repairing to go out against the Americans. The masters are learning navigation for the purpose of going on the American coast.”⁷⁶ Particularly alarming was the relation that one “Mr. Cooper,” a Virginian “of respectable birth and connexions,” was said to have outfitted a ship and cruised against American vessels and had reportedly sought a commission from Algiers. Congressman William Loughton Smith supposed

⁷² *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 434.

⁷³ *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 487.

⁷⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 439.

⁷⁵ *American States Papers: Foreign Relations* 1:413-14.

⁷⁶ “Extract of a Letter ...,” *Weekly Register* (Norwich), 8 April 1794.

“British or American renegadoes” may reach America “very soon,” while he “could not tell where the danger might end; nor did he know whether Philadelphia itself would be in safety.”⁷⁷ At the time of his capture in 1785, the master Richard O’Brien initially dismissed the prospect of Algerian raids on American shores as unlikely, but his harangues to Congress and its agents became increasingly alarmist as his decade in captivity wore on. After Algerian privateers captured the eleven American vessels in 1793, O’Brien exhorted David Humphreys over a raid in the United States: “then, sir, what will be the consequences; what will be the alarm?”⁷⁸

North African privateers never did raid the coast of the United States as they had the seaside villages of the Mediterranean and locales as distant as County Cork and Iceland in prior centuries, but Americans did sometimes meet North Africans on their own isolated shores. The Algerian-commercial vessel *Muqueni*, for example, crossed the Atlantic and dropped anchor in Baltimore in 1798.⁷⁹ Four years earlier the Philadelphia Gazette reported that two “Natives of Algiers” had arrived in Pennsylvania and had “waited on his Excellency the Governor. We are informed their stay will be but short in town, as they contemplate a tour through the continent.”⁸⁰ The subterfuge and sinister plotting revealed in Peter Markoe’s popular book *The Algerine spy in Pennsylvania* cast even the seemingly benign activities of North Africans in the United States as sinister. Such suspicions are apparent in the hostile reception of three North African Jews upon their arrival in Virginia in 1785, only months after Algiers had declared war on the United States and captured the *Maria* and *Dauphin*. Governor Patrick Henry ordered the two men and one woman locked up before their interrogation,

⁷⁷ *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 435-36.

⁷⁸ *American States Papers: Foreign Relations*, 1: 419-20.

⁷⁹ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 156.

⁸⁰ “Natives of Algiers,” *The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, 22 September 1794.

during which the strangers—unable to read English—could not vouch for their travelling papers, while their interrogator was likewise unable to corroborate the claim they sought admittance to a temple in Philadelphia. Uneasy over the North Africans’ presence, Henry ordered the three deported.⁸¹

C. A humiliating matter of leverage

Long before the short-lived Portuguese truce facilitated the capture of 119 American sailors in 1793, American diplomats had continued to agitate for the safety tentatively assured by an American-Algerian treaty, notwithstanding the reality that Congress could ill-afford to fulfill the onerous obligations of such an arrangement. Although the treaty with Morocco had been a promising start, diplomats recognized their nation lacked any leverage to effect agreeable treaties with the Barbary powers. As the French naval secretary advised in 1786, Americans were deceiving themselves if they expected their North African negotiating partners to submit to easy terms for peace and “forego the advantages” they gained by preserving American-flagged vessels as viable targets. The negotiating agents, he wrote, were saddled with a difficult task in seeking a “*good*, or to speak more properly, the least *burthensome* conditions” for a treaty, especially with Algiers.⁸² Americans supposed the economies of North Africa depended upon captured ships and goods, extortionate ransoms, and occasional breaches of existing treaties in order to force new concessions. Richard O’Brien, who would later become the American consul in Algiers, observed in 1785 that Algiers “must be at war with some,” an observation Foss inverted a decade later when he reported that the Dey

⁸¹ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 3-6.

⁸² *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 234-35.

“could not be at peace with all nations at once.”⁸³ Thomas Jefferson calculated the cost of raising a navy and suing for peace from the mouth of a cannon would be no more expensive and far more honorable than paying tribute, yet the importance of trade and aversion to military spending obliged the United States to offer what was later deemed “a confession of weakness or want of courage that was to the shame of all Christendom!” As John Adams wrote to John Jay, the United States would “sooner or later submit” to the “humiliating tribute” demanded by the Barbary States.⁸⁴

A diplomatic report issued by Adams, Franklin, and Jefferson projected that any treaties the Americans could reach were likely to be “as heavy as they are degrading.” For a nation with tenuous political alliances, no credit, a weak central government, no navy, and scant ability to raise one, the options were limited: “Presents or war is their usual alternative.”⁸⁵ As one captured master observed, the lack of strong diplomatic ties with any nation capable of interceding in behalf of the United States left the captives isolated and vulnerable. The captive complained that he was entirely “without a friend, for the Americans have none here.”⁸⁶ The greater challenge, however, was overcoming domestic shortcomings. John Jay saw the weakness of the Articles of Confederation writ large in the United States’ inability to negotiate a reasonable treaty with Algiers for future immunity and the release of its mariners. “The situation of our captive countrymen at Algiers is much to be lamented, and the more so as their deliverance is difficult to effect ... and Government, (if it may be called a Government) is so inadequate to its objects, that essential alterations or essential evils must take

⁸³ *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 655; Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 120.

⁸⁴ Henry M. Field, *The Barbary Coast* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1893), 79-82; *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 475-76.

⁸⁵ *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 534-40.

⁸⁶ “... Copy of a letter from captain John Burnham ...,” *American Minerva* (New York), 2 April 1794.

place.”⁸⁷ Likewise, in a letter to the Marquis de Lafayette during the Constitutional Convention, George Washington rued the shortcomings of the existing government: “vain is it to talk of chastising the Algerines, or doing ourselves Justice in any other respect, till the wisdom and force of the Union can be more concentrated and better applied.”⁸⁸

Further complicating early negotiations was the early American diplomats’ lack of hard data on North Africa. Apart from the imaginative Islamic world encountered on stage, in books, and through a smattering of dubious travel accounts, few Americans had visited the domains of Islam and reported on the particulars of these places. When Morocco and Algiers first seized American ships in the 1780s, the American ministers in Europe assumed responsibility for negotiations there. Despite the closeness afforded from their southern European outposts, these ministers apparently knew very little about the place that had generated so great an alarm. Multiplying the difficulty of negotiating with the Barbary States was the speed of communication to the distant United States. Intelligence and orders between the United States and the crucial Paris mission were so sparse that Thomas Jefferson supposed, “We might as well be in [*sic.*] the moon.”⁸⁹ North Africa was comparatively plutonian. When Adams and Jefferson sought to appoint Thomas Barclay as an agent to redeem the captured seamen in Morocco and negotiate treaties regionally, they tasked him with filling a gaping lacuna regarding their negotiating partners. Barclay was to inquire about basic trading habits, levies, taxes, ports, naval and military capacities, systems of government, and

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 808-12.

⁸⁸ “George Washington to Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, August 15, 1787,” *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 2 Letterbooks*, 137-41.

⁸⁹ “Thomas Jefferson to Francis Hopkins, 13 January 1785,” *Founders Online, National Archives*. <<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-07-02-0437>>.

standard procedures for redeeming captives. The ministers were uncertain of the languages of North Africa, and they were especially keen to learn “by what principle of their religion is it that they consider all Christian Powers as their enemies.”⁹⁰ Barclay cadged a great deal of information while negotiating, but it is emblematic of American capabilities in the 1780s that the intelligence pointed to little the Americans could do to maintain open waterways. Even a decade of fitful negotiations with Algiers apparently equipped the American government with precious little insight into life there. The presidential proclamation for the 1795 peace treaty with Algiers, for example, misidentified the document’s original language as Arabic, rather than Turkish.⁹¹

Despite occasional questions over the role of Islam, the dominant concerns expressed in diplomatic correspondence of this period remained *realpolitik*. Reflecting on the failure of the early American treaties in North Africa, some scholars have suggested that among the Barbary states, “power alone was respected.”⁹² Some eighteenth-century Americans involved in these affairs clearly did endorse this view. William Pennock wrote to naval architect Josiah Fox in 1795 that he had always believed “the only way to keep [Dey Hasan Bashaw] in Order is to let him see you have the power to Compell him.”⁹³ Renewed Algerian cruising in 1793 after eight years of calm prompted David Humphreys to suggest that “no choice is left for the United States but to prepare a naval force, with all possible expedition.”⁹⁴ Although Congress had requisitioned a navy, it was built with anything but expedition, and Humphreys would play an instrumental role in securing a treaty with Algiers without any navy supporting

⁹⁰ *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 656-62.

⁹¹ George Washington, *To All to Whom these Presents Shall Come* (Philadelphia: 1796).

⁹² Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 63.

⁹³ “William Pennock to Josiah Fox, 15 March 1796,” *Papers of the War Department, 1784-1800* <<http://wardepartmentpapers.org/document.php?id=16958>>; *NDWBP, Register of Officer Personnel*, 19.

⁹⁴ *American States Papers: Foreign Relations* 1:413.

his efforts. Even after the ships built in order to defend American commerce against piracy weighed anchor, the United States continued to abide by its treaty obligations and delivered naval stores to North Africa. On a voyage to deliver presents to Dey Hasan Bashaw's successor in 1800, an indignant William Bainbridge wrote that "I hope I may never again be sent to Algiers with *tribute*, unless I am authorized to deliver it from the mouth of our cannon."⁹⁵ William Eaton, the consul at the time, reflected on this abjection in his personal journal: "I never thought to find a corner of this slanderous world where 'baseness' and 'American' were wedded, but here we are the byword of derision, quoted as precedents of baseness, even by the Danes!"⁹⁶

Although the notion of a preventive naval force palliated the injured pride of many Americans, it was money that had long been the most common vehicle for delivering captives from North Africa.⁹⁷ Writing during his captivity, future consul general Richard O'Brien reported that "money is their God, and Mahomet is their Prophet. If you give a Turk money with one hand, you may take out his eyes with the other."⁹⁸ When Jefferson reported to John Jay that Algiers could not be pressured into negotiations through the intercession of the Sublime Porte, he bemoaned that "money was the sole agent at Algiers, except so far as fear could be induced also."⁹⁹ Even by the time Bainbridge cursed his mission bearing tribute in 1800, the fact remained that the United States lacked the military strength to induce fear. The American blockade of Tripoli in 1801 did not force capitulation; instead, it gave way to four years of intermittent battles, including the loss of the *U.S.S. Philadelphia*—and its pyrrhic boarding and destruction led by Stephen Decatur. The war's bizarre culmination came

⁹⁵ Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 51-52; and London, *Victory in Tripoli*, 6.

⁹⁶ London, *Victory in Tripoli*, 85.

⁹⁷ Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 11.

⁹⁸ "Extract of a Letter from a Sea Captain," *New-York Morning Post*, 10 February 1787.

⁹⁹ *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 750-52.

as the former consul William Eaton attempted to restore to power Ahmed Qaramanli, the exiled elder brother of the sitting potentate. Eaton raised a force of Greek, Albanian, and Arab mercenaries and marched with Qaramanli from Alexandria to the Libyan city of Derna, which the forces captured in hopes of fomenting a popular uprising in support of the deposed leader. The quixotic plan fell apart as word arrived that hostilities had ended with a favorable peace agreement with the sitting leader.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, it was Decatur, not Eaton, who became the conflict's hero—for the “bold” and “daring” act of destroying his own nation's captured ship-of-the-line, the *Philadelphia*. The United States did enjoy some military and naval victories in Tripoli, yet the campaigns did not win the release of the *Philadelphia*'s crew (now treated as prisoners of war, not ordinary captives), although the victories did substantially lower the price. More importantly, they gave Americans identifiable successes that resonated with increasingly meliorist expectations for their nation.

D. American poverty

The fact remained that even in 1805 the United States would necessarily continue to rely upon money to free its captive citizens, even if its mounting ability to apply force could depress the price. From the earliest days of American Barbary captivity, paying redemption money had presented a distinct challenge of another kind. As the American captives informed the Algerian court, their government admittedly had “little money,” and what money it did have was not in the desired gold or silver specie, but paper.¹⁰¹ On a mission to ransom the 20 Americans and one Frenchmen held in

¹⁰⁰ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 194-98. Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 133-47.

¹⁰¹ *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 1:117.

Algiers from 1785, the ill-suited agent and mule trader John Lamb failed to negotiate a lower price than \$1,200 per captive, *twelve times* the price he was authorized to pay. Lamb wrote to Jefferson that the matter was a lost cause: “Your Excellency sees how feeble we are.” Lamb had no doubt that a peace agreement could be settled, “but it will cost a tour to Constantinople.”¹⁰² By 1795, only a few of the men Lamb had failed to redeem remained in Algiers. Most had died, although at least two men had ransomed themselves for £700 after seven years in Algiers gave them little reason to hope their government would liberate them. Those who remained were joined by the 119 Americans who were captured in 1793. On his mission to redeem them, the American agent Joseph Donaldson, much like his predecessor Lamb, was reported to be “dancing over Europe” to borrow the money.¹⁰³

While some American sailors held in Algiers turned to shipping companies or relatives for succor, most turned to their government. Their entreaties were not quickly gratified. They became bargaining chips in protracted treaty negotiations. Their government worked diplomatic back channels while casting itself as aloof to avoid pushing the price for redemption higher. For centuries, French and Spanish captives had looked to the Trinitarian and Mercedarian religious orders for their redemption. Thomas Jefferson believed the Trinitarians, sometimes known as the Mathurins, could intercede in behalf of the American captives, and in 1787 he inveigled the Paris-based religious order to treat for them on the condition that the government’s backing be conducted sub-rosa. Although the mission showed early promise, the complexities and ineffectiveness of the Confederation government, growing anti-clerical sentiment in

¹⁰² *Diplomatic Correspondence*, 739-40.

¹⁰³ *Philadelphia Gazette*, 5 September 1796.

France, and the rising value of Algerian captives due to plague epidemics and other redemptions frustrated the efforts.¹⁰⁴

Worsening matters was the slow and unreliable trickle of information on the captives. Letters were somewhat scarce, as John Burnham explained, because “the land carriage is too much.”¹⁰⁵ Newspaper editors combed the few letters that did arrive to compile rosters of local captives who had succumbed to plague, hard labor, or accident, with one such list mentioning 14 captives who perished in the period between January and August of 1794. The more optimistic editors compiled lists recording which captives “remain alive.” The Newburyport sailor Nicholas Hartford was included in one such list in 1795, which no doubt came as a surprise given that he had been “Published as dead in late accounts.”¹⁰⁶ Indignant at the apparent government inaction and mortified by the likelihood their loved ones would die so ignominiously, sailors’ families actively petitioned the government to redeem their fathers, brothers, and sons. Ministers, clerks, and other officials received frequent suggestions that the nation undertake a lottery to raise money for the men’s release, while pledge drives solicited donations directly from the public. Theater owners staged shows such as the *Tyrant of Algiers* in order to raise collections for the captives’ relief, with the Boston Theater raising nearly \$900 in May 1794.¹⁰⁷ Coffee houses, salons and voluntary associations undertook their own fundraising efforts.¹⁰⁸ Among those in government, David Humphreys believed the “thorny business” of relieving the captives would be

¹⁰⁴ James G. Lydon, “Thomas Jefferson and the Mathurins,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 49, (1963), 192-202.

¹⁰⁵ “... Copy of a letter from captain John Burnham ...,” *American Minerva* (New York), 2 April 1794.

¹⁰⁶ “Newburyport, August ...,” *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), 10 August 1795.

¹⁰⁷ “For the Benefit of the Unfortunate Americans ... in Algiers” (Newport, 1794).

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence A. Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785-1816* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 57-60.

expensive, and he appealed to the American public for aid. In an address written from Algiers, Humphreys goaded his readers by wondering aloud where there is “within the limits of the United States an individual who will not cheerfully contribute.”¹⁰⁹

The captives did not suffer in isolation. One embittered captain petitioned the Congress that in his absence his wife was “obliged to put her children out for their living and herself obliged to work hard for her bread. That is your liberty in sweet America. I put confidence in General Washington that he with the help of God may turn your hard heart.”¹¹⁰ One Newburyport newspaper account effused that “one word” from Washington would be the long-awaited “fiat of god-like beneficence” that could spur the effort to redeem the “free born Sons of Columbia” then “tugging at the oar from morn to eve” in Algiers.¹¹¹ Despite the public’s flagging belief in his government’s interest in the captives, George Washington did not address the captives in Algiers when he declared a day of thanksgiving and prayer in 1795. Congregationalists in Marblehead, Massachusetts who committed money for the captives at that time resolved that they were “disposed to do their part towards their final redemption, even if they stood alone in this interesting matter.”¹¹²

Among fundraising efforts was a 1791 Boston almanac that contained, “besides what is usual, a true Narrative of the shocking Captivity of Robert White, among the *Algerines*.” The account purported to be the story of a Massachusetts sailor named Robert White, who was said to have been captured by Algerian cruisers in March 1783. An editorial comment at the end of the dubious account suggests it was a patent

¹⁰⁹ “Redemption of American Captives at Algiers. Address, To the People of the United States of America,” *Morning Star* (Newburyport), 12 November 1794.

¹¹⁰ Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 36.

¹¹¹ “Plan of a Continental Contribution for the Relief of Our American Brethren,” *Impartial Herald* (Newburyport), 23 January 1795.

¹¹² “Brief,” *Impartial Herald* (Newburyport), 2 February 1795.

fabrication intended to raise contributions to return the real “children of *misfortune* and *wretchedness* to their *Families* and *Friends*, notwithstanding the well-known avarice of the haughty *Dey*.”¹¹³ The likelihood of that happening apparently grew vanishingly small. In 1792 Congress agreed to an annual \$2,400 distribution to be made among the captives of 1785 or their families in the event the nation never came to a permanent treaty with Algiers.¹¹⁴

Despite the public and official efforts, the first American captives in “Algiers, city of bondage,” spent eleven years awaiting redemption. Their plight convinced some captives and citizens that the nation could and would do little to bring the men home. The evidence of American naval weakness and ham-fisted diplomatic blundering justify this sentiment. While no American sailors would come close to spending as long in Barbary captivity as the men captured in 1785, North African privateers would capture several hundred American sailors before the Second Barbary War of 1815 and the British bombardment of Algiers in 1816. French colonialism in 1830 fairly ended Algerian privateering. Throughout the late eighteenth century, American captivity in North Africa generated significant public interest through an ascendant public sphere that was facilitated by new media and the increasing ease of communication.¹¹⁵ The fortunes of their countrymen in North Africa deeply influenced the American public’s self-perception and eroded its confidence in the mechanisms of federal government. Barbary captivity also generated a literary form with deep and penetrating reach by reflecting a culturally ingrained paradigm. It drew inspiration from earlier European Barbary captivity accounts and the literature of Native American captivity, but similar

¹¹³ *A curious, historical and entertaining Narrative of the Captivity and almost unheard-of Sufferings and cruel Treatment of Mr. Robert White in Bickerstaff’s Genuine Boston Almanack ... for 1791 ...* (Boston: Russel, 1791), 1-7.

¹¹⁴ *American State Papers: Foreign Relations*, 1:133.

¹¹⁵ Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 7-70.

impulses had indeed been at the roots of the American conception of the war for independence as the unshackling of a nation bound by tyrannical despotism. Physical captivity in North Africa would be merely another jarringly literal manifestation of that motif. It is significant that Barbary captivity framed the American nation as vulnerable and incapable of pursuing its interests beyond its isolated shores. As we shall see, a powerful afflictive model of progress assured many Americans like John Foss that their suffering was not in vain.

CHAPTER III

ISLAM, CAPTIVITY, AND AMERICAN SLAVERY

The Algerines, a few days past, captured an American brig off Malaga. The crew escaped in the boat. They had better fall into the hands of the Miami Indians than suffer what we have experienced.¹¹⁶

The American sailor Daniel Saunders wrote in the 1794 account of his shipwreck in Dhofar and his overland march to Muscat that he need not give a “particular history of the Arabs,” as “the propagation of a new religion, and the founding of a vast empire, by their countryman MAHOMET, are subjects with which every one is acquainted.”¹¹⁷ The Baptist minister John Leland, a staunch defender of religious liberty and an ally of Thomas Jefferson, reported that while growing up in eighteenth-century Massachusetts he had heard about the “Mahomedan imposture” in church every Sunday.¹¹⁸ In the early American imagination Islam was a potent construct, yet many of John Foss’s contemporaries attest to what Kambiz GhaneaBassiri has called the “abiding presence and diversity of Muslims in the United States,” traceable to the earliest transatlantic commercial, military, and exploratory interactions.¹¹⁹ Indeed, Americans came to know Islam through both highly

¹¹⁶ “Copy . . . 8th year of captivity,” *Impartial Herald* (Newburyport), 2 August 1793.

¹¹⁷ Daniel Saunders, *A Journal of the Travels and Sufferings of Daniel Saunders, jun.* (Salem: Thomas Cushing, 1794), appendix, 5.

¹¹⁸ John Leland, “Extracts from Number Two, A Little Sermon Sixteen Minutes Long,” in *The Writings of the Elder John Leland*, ed. L.F. Greene (New York: G.W. Wood, 1845), 410, quoted in Denise A. Spellberg, *Thomas Jefferson’s Quran: Islam and the Founders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 14.

¹¹⁹ While Christopher Columbus’s 1492 voyage and early expeditions mounted by the Spanish in the American Southwest may have employed Muslims, some dubitable scholarship has suggested that Muslims arrived in the Americas during the twelfth century—based on the evidence plucked from medieval geographies or, oddly, Columbus’s own journal. Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-2.

romanticized accounts and in religious contexts, as well as through the occasional direct contacts that are among the earliest instances of European entrée into the New World.

Among the most striking aspects of the presence of Islam in the United States is its intertwined relationship with the structures of captivity and slavery that are embedded in American identity. American individuals and community groups became captives in North Africa as well as among Native Americans, and the nation as a whole was portrayed as being captive to British colonial rule. These institutions drew the metes and bounds of early American discourse on national identity and the limits of freedom, and they reveal deep-seated beliefs that were not merely propagandistic or rhetorical tools. As Bernard Bailyn has suggested, the use of terms such as “slavery” during the Revolution articulated “real fears, real anxieties, a sense of real danger.”¹²⁰ So understood, we are beholden to moot the possibility that self-identified “slaves in Algiers,” as well as those who wrote and spoke about Barbary captivity at home, intended to be taken quite literally. Abolitionists used Barbary captivity as a wedge for their cause, while slavery apologists interpreted the slavery of Americans in North Africa as a justification for the existence of slavery in the United States. Although Congress did not rely on these identifications to determine naval or diplomatic policy toward the Barbary states, paradigms of captivity did inflect the congressional debate.

Adding further interest to the paradigms of slavery and captivity is the fact they intersected with mounting European and American interest in Islam and its cultural products. Discursively charged and highly romanticized accounts of Islam became increasingly popular in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, good-faith attempts to present the doctrines of Islam honestly were also appearing in print.

¹²⁰ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 230-46, quoted at foreword.

Captivity accounts often straddled the line between these two forms, as captivity writers attempted to craft appealing literary accounts while relating practical intelligence cadged from their years abroad. Within this literature, Islam became a canvas on which many Americans outlined their own domestic political needs. This discursive adoption of Islam should not obscure the real American interest in Islam and the related captivity paradigms that molded American identity while considering the failure to realize American ideals.

A. The long history of American captivity

Though the earliest dimensions of American captivity in North Africa remain to be explored in full, known records point to Barbary captivity as a factor in American life from the earliest days of colonization. As early as 1625 Moroccan corsairs captured two ships belonging to the Separatist colony in Plymouth, five years after its founding. Anglo-Americans continued to populate the rosters of captives belonging to the English crown through much of the seventeenth century. A Roxbury father and son were held for three years at Salé after their capture in 1671. Three years later, residents of Boston contributed to public collections to redeem their compatriot Edward Howard out of “his sad Turkish captivity.” After becoming a captive in Algiers in 1679, William Harris redeemed himself for \$1,200, a sum he reckoned was “the price of a good farm.”¹²¹ Among the 900 captives whom the English redeemed from “Mackiness and Salley” in 1680 were eleven Americans, mostly from New England.¹²² The records of colonial

¹²¹ Charles Sumner, *White Slavery in the Barbary States* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1853), 67-70.

¹²² Joshua Gee, *Narrative of Joshua Gee of Boston, Mass., While He was Captive in Algeria of the Barbary pirates*, ed. Albert Carlos Bates (Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum, 1943), 7-8.

American captives suggests that the bonds of captivity cut across social strata, involving middling sorts as well as men “of good estate” and “consequence.” Among the prominent men taken captive was Seth Southell, who was captured and held in Algiers in 1679 as he sailed to the New World to assume the post of governor in the Carolina province. Nor was North Africa the only arena in which Anglo-Americans became captives under Muslim masters. Most famous was the English explorer and soldier John Smith, who was wounded in battle against the Tatars only a few years before he undertook his famous expeditions in Virginia. Following his capture, Smith and the other wounded were “sold for Slaves, like Beasts in a Market-place, where every Merchant, viewing their Limbs and Wounds, caused other slaves to struggle with them, to try their strength.”¹²³

On returning home, some captives found a receptive and established market for the rich and embellished accounts of their experiences as captives. The captivity narrative had long constituted a major form in American literature, as colonial women like Mary Rowlandson and Elizabeth Hanson chronicled their sexual and pietistic fortitude following their capture by Native Americans. Often hewing to a Calvinistic heuristic, these writers demonstrated the spiritual rewards due to those who resisted the temptation to end their suffering through assimilation and conversion. The antebellum years would see these forms adopted in the accounts of slaves like Solomon Northup and Austin Steward, who detailed the horrors of the Southern plantation, along with their seemingly providential deliverance. Captivity accounts written by Europeans held among Muslims share in these themes, along with the common captivity trope of sexual

¹²³ John Smith, *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captain John Smith* (London: Awnsam and John Church, 1704), 382-94. Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 6-7.

tension between captor and captive. Cotton Mather, for example, preached in consonant terms regarding both Indian and Barbary captivity, while John Smith's self-aggrandizing account records how he escaped Turkish "Thraldom" by murdering an overseer with a threshing bat and stealing his clothes and horse, but not before he won the "compassion" and "love" of his "Lady." This theme suggestively echoes Smith's account of how the teenaged princess Pocahontas "hazarded the beating out of her own Brains to save mine" at the time of his execution in 1607.¹²⁴ Animating Smith's account is the assurance, common among seventeenth-century captivity accounts of all stripes, that "God beyond Man's Expectation or Imagination helpeth his Servants, when they least think of help."¹²⁵

Conceiving of his captivity in much the same way was the Bostonian Joshua Gee, who endured seven years of "Gods Chastisments & Reprofs" as a captive in Algiers beginning in 1680. Following his redemption, Gee wrote what is believed to be the first American Barbary captivity account. Although Gee appears to have returned to Boston to some celebrity—bringing with him intelligence as well as a pair of "Jerusalem Garters" for prominent local judge and slavery opponent Samuel Sewall—his account remained unpublished until its discovery by a New England manuscript hunter in the mid-twentieth century.¹²⁶ Although Gee's account initiated the Barbary captivity form in America, his would be the only such account for more than a century. Barbary captivity accounts by the British became increasingly uncommon—disappearing altogether in the American context—as the Royal Navy power waxed in

¹²⁴ John Smith, "Capt. Smith's PETITION to Her Majesty" in *The History of Virginia, in Four Parts*, Robert Beverly (London: B. and S. Tooke, 1722), 26-29.

¹²⁵ Smith, *The True Travels*, 393.

¹²⁶ Gee's brief account lacks a strong narrative but describes his routine experiences: beatings, a bout of plague, and one "mirakelos" passage through a storm, attributed by the master to God's "perculier Love for som one in this ship." Gee, *Narrative of Joshua Gee*, 24.

the late seventeenth century. Under the protection of the British crown, American colonists “equally shared the advantages accruing from the terror of their name.”¹²⁷ As a result, Gee’s would remain the only American Barbary captivity account to appear before the American Revolution.

The formal captivity account, however, was not the only storytelling form available to American captives. Some captives wrote widely circulated and reprinted letters describing the method of their capture, the conditions under which they labored, and the prospects for further attacks. Such letters appeared in great numbers following the most significant eighteenth-century captivity events for Americans in North Africa: Algerian privateers’ seizure of two American vessels in 1785 and eleven more in 1793. Mathew Carey compiled some of these letters in his jaunty 1794 work, *A Short Account of Algiers*, which otherwise consisted largely of extracts borrowed liberally from British geographies. The far more substantial 1797 *Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers* by James Wilson Stevens was likewise a derivative composite of earlier tracts, but it did contain the original account of the sailor Isaac Brooks, a captive in Algiers who was left “nearly” blind by his experiences, “a misfortune which afforded him ample leisure for rendering a more minute account.”¹²⁸ Bypassing the public altogether, Richard O’Brien wrote many detailed letters to Congress and in 1788 he petitioned George Washington directly with a letter he described as “a Narrative of our Captivity by the Algerines.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ *History of the War between the United States and Tripoli* (Salem: Salem Gazette Office, 1806), 3.

¹²⁸ James Wilson Stevens, *An Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers* (Philadelphia: Hogan & M’Elroy, 1797), vi-vii.

¹²⁹ Richard O’Brien, “Algerine Captives to George Washington, September 22, 1788,” *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4, General Correspondence, 1697-1799*, 16-17.

John Foss became the first American to publish a firsthand account of captivity in North Africa when his *Journal* reached booksellers in January 1798. The first 1,000 copies of Foss's account quickly sold out, and the work enjoyed a vastly expanded second edition that was advertised in newspapers in cities across the eastern seaboard.¹³⁰ Early historians looking back on the *Journal* deemed it "an interesting narrative" and a book of "small literary merit." Foss's work became the opening salvo in a major publishing boom.¹³¹ Subsequent captivity narratives enjoyed huge success, and American publishers sent more than one hundred editions of Barbary captivity accounts to press in the twenty years following the publication of Foss's *Journal*.¹³² The most popular of these was Captain James Riley's 1817 account of shipwreck and enslavement by "Wandering Arabs" in the Sahara Desert. In the thirty years after its release, Riley's account supposed enjoyed more than one million readers across some two dozen editions. Riley's tale of an American enslaved in Africa became a useful discursive tool for American abolitionists, and its influence was sufficiently widespread that it affected the young Abraham Lincoln's views on slavery.¹³³ Archibald Robbins, a crewman on Riley's ship, wrote his own account that went through a similar number of imprints. With such potentially lucrative fodder at hand, fiction writers also capitalized on the Barbary captivity genre's popularity. Among the fictionalized texts are dubious accounts like that of "John Vandike," who was purportedly captured by Algerians before escaping with "a Beautiful Young English Lady." Although no American women

¹³⁰ John J. Currier, *History of Newburyport, Mass., 1764-1909*, vol. 2 (Newburyport: Printed for the author, 1909), 497.

¹³¹ Joshua Coffin, *A Sketch of the History of Newbury, Newburyport, and West Newbury, from 1635 to 1845* (Boston: S.G. Drake, 1845), 270; John Louis Ewell, *The Story of Byfield, a New England Parish* (Boston: G.E. Littlefield, 1904), 193.

¹³² Paul Baepler, introduction to *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of Barbary Captivity Narratives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 24.

¹³³ Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 2.

are known to have been held captive in North Africa, the fictional *Captivity and Sufferings* of “Mrs. Mary Velnet” enjoyed multiple editions and was also given a fresh title and republished as the *Affecting History* of “Mrs. Mary Gerard.” Similarly repackaged was the interminably popular account of “Mrs. Maria Martin” (whose name became “Mrs. Lucinda Martin” in a later retelling). Whether rooted in genuine experiences, cobbled together from other works, or purely imaginative, Barbary captivity accounts provided American readers a window into a world they hungrily sought to know.

Among the elements drawing Americans to these accounts was their supposed illumination of Islam. Muslims appeared in myriad fictionalized forms in addition to captivity accounts in the colonial and early independent United States, as fiction writers capitalized on the perceived exoticism, sexuality, and barbarity of the Islamic world. The didactic Oriental tale represented, by one estimate, one out of every ten fiction pieces appearing in American magazines prior to 1800, a far greater portion than any other generic form.¹³⁴ The 1790s saw the first American printing of the *Arabian Nights* as well as a special edition of Sinbad’s journeys.¹³⁵ The serially popular British play *Mahomet, the Imposter* made its American debut in British-controlled New York in 1780, and American revolutionaries reworked the play to promote their cause in subsequent North American performances. The play had been adapted from Voltaire’s 1742 play *Le Fantisme*, yet so capacious was its depiction of Islam’s rise that even in

¹³⁴ This measure considers tales of India, China and other parts of the Asia alongside those featuring the Middle East as belonging to the category of Oriental tales. It is derived from Edward Pitcher’s index of works of fiction published in the U.S. before 1800. See: Jim Egan, *Oriental Shadows: The Presence of the East in Early American Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), quoted at 78.

¹³⁵ Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 17.

1796 Americans were staging it to decry the French Revolution.¹³⁶ Susanna Rowson peeled back the seraglio curtain as she explored sexual fortitude, filial piety, and women's social standing in her 1794 play *Slaves in Algiers*. Royall Tyler's 1797 *The Algerine Captive*, considered to be one of the first American novels, brought a fictionalized Islam home to American readers in the form of a two-part memoir. Among the most notable examples of Oriental fiction is *The Algerine spy in Pennsylvania*, which contained letters purportedly written by an Algerian scout on a surreptitious mission to the United States. *The Algerine spy* exposed the perceived national institutional dangers of Islam that Barbary captivity largely confirmed.

American readers were eager for "true relations" as well as romanticized accounts, and British titles as well as original American imprints met the demand.¹³⁷ Daniel Saunders' 1794 account of his shipwreck in the southeastern Arabian Peninsula included a long appendix in which Saunders blended his own observations with reference to Gibbon. Although some of the information it contained was of dubious value ("... the honor of their women, and of their *beards*, is most easily wounded ..."), Saunders' account generated enough interest to warrant multiple editions. In the same year that Saunders' tale of his 1,000-kilometer, 51-day overland march appeared, Mathew Carey published his geographic description of Algiers, complete with maps and a "concise view" of the events leading to the 1793 Algerian captivity crisis. Motivated by "the complete development of TRUTH," James Wilson Stevens published his *Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers* in 1797. Interest in the religious

¹³⁶ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 44; Spellberd, *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an*, 28-33.

¹³⁷ George Washington's library, for example, contained Joseph Morgan's translation of *A compleat history of the piratical states of barbary*, which remained an important source text for derivative American works describing North Africa. "List of Books at Mount Vernon, 1764" *Founders Online, National Archives*. <<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/02-07-02-0216>>.

practices of the Middle East encouraged American publishers to print editions of Humphrey Prideaux's seventeenth-century *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet* in 1796 and 1798. A similarly polemical biography called the *Life of Mahomet* first appeared in Britain in the 1790s and was reprinted in Massachusetts in 1802, while Thomas Jefferson's ownership of a 1764 printing of George Sale's Qur'an has inspired recent scholarship (and political controversy).¹³⁸

As with literary fiction, the evidence of the political sphere demonstrates that in American hands Islam remained highly malleable. The Orient became a looking glass in which early American statesmen saw their own political causes take shape, and the ornamental figures associated with Islam were made to speak in a way that fulfilled the needs of domestic debate. We find, by way of example, myriad instances in which Islam was made to furnish warnings over the pitfalls of ineffective government. John Adams wrote telegraphically in 1790 that revolutionary unrest in France could precipitate the rise of a "mad despot, who, with the enthusiasm of another Mahomet," would upend social order and plunge that nation into chaos.¹³⁹ Secretary of War Henry Knox drew lessons for dealing with native peoples on the southwestern frontier by observing the European practices of proffering douceurs to the Muslim rulers of North Africa. It appeared to Knox that "barbarous nations, in all ages" expected "presents from those more civilized."¹⁴⁰ Alexander Hamilton discerned an ominous example of tyranny and caprice in the functions of Islamic government. Hamilton argued in Federalist 30 that without an institutionalized system of taxation, the proposed United States federal

¹³⁸ See: Spellberg, *Thomas Jefferson's Qur'an*. Minnesota Rep. Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to Congress, was criticized in some circles when he swore the ceremonial oath of office upon Jefferson's copy of the Qur'an in 2007.

¹³⁹ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 35-42, quoted at 40.

¹⁴⁰ *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 4, ed. Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 529-36.

government would falter and degenerate into rapacity, just as the Ottoman system had. He observed that the Ottoman “sovereign, though in other respects absolute master of the lives and fortunes of his subjects, has no right to impose a new tax. The consequence is that he permits the bashaws or governors of provinces to pillage the people without mercy.”¹⁴¹ Warnings such as Hamilton’s were generally vague and fungible, and they are a near carbon copy of sentiments Foss and others later expressed over the government of Algiers. For all the ambiguity of these warnings, some Americans did find specific and tangible examples of Islam and Muslims as a visceral threat to the United States. James Madison trumpeted the threat of piracy in Federalist 41 by suggesting that disunity would leave maritime commerce subject to “the rapacious demands of pirates and barbarians.”¹⁴² This was not merely speculation, for only three years before Madison enunciated his vision for the military powers of the proposed federal government in 1788, some 20 Americans were taken at sea and brought to Algiers as captives.

Among those being held captive was James Leander Cathcart, who expressed indignation that although the United States was a new and putatively isolationist nation, it had inherited from Europe disadvantageous relations with the Islamic world. Yet even more than their European counterparts, many Americans apparently believed they had no footing to negotiate an acceptable treaty. Richard O’Brien wrote plaintively that the Dey’s proposed terms for peace with the United States would be the “most dishonourablest” ever mooted by a “Republican Government.” O’Brien believed the Dey felt justified in making especially hash demand of the United States because of the

¹⁴¹ “Federalist 30,” *The Library of Congress*,
<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_30.html>.

¹⁴² “Federalist 41,” *The Library of Congress*,
<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_41.html>.

latter's remoteness, debt, inclination toward peace, and that it apparently "wished to be friends with all Mankind."¹⁴³ During his time as a captive, James Leander Cathcart tried to leverage American insularity when he sought lenity with a "petty tyrant" of an overseer. The overseer "was determined to retaliate" against Christians as a result of his own cruel treatment as a galley slave to the Maltese. Cathcart reasoned that it was unjust that he suffer due to the cruelty of the Maltese, while "in America there probably had never been a Mussulman and ... we never had been at war with any nation of that religion."¹⁴⁴ This same sentiment animates the 1797 treaty with Tripoli, which stipulated that, "as the Government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility of Mussulmen," and had never gone to war with "any Mahometan nation, ... no pretext, arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries."¹⁴⁵

B. Muslims in America

While the United States had not captured North African Muslims for galley slaves as some nations of Mediterranean Europe had, early Americans clearly did have occasional flesh-and-blood contact with Islam, sometimes in the New World.¹⁴⁶ An important but frequently neglected point of contact between Islam and the early United

¹⁴³ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 82-8

¹⁴⁴ Cathcart writes that Rais responded by saying the only reason the Christian United States had not waged war on Muslims "was not for the want of will, but for the want of power." Cathcart, *The Captives*, 47-50.

¹⁴⁵ *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 2:18-19.

¹⁴⁶ Ahmad bin al-Ghazal, an eighteenth-century Moroccan diplomat in Spain, chronicled the horrors experienced by Muslim captives there. Also of interest is the *Journey* of Mohammad bin abd al-Wahab al-Ghassani, who traveled to Spain in the seventeenth century to ransom captives. This account is included in Matar's *In the Lands of the Christians*.

States was institutional slavery. African slaves, including some Muslims, sustained the Southern economies and propped up financial and commercial industries in the North.¹⁴⁷ Despite the paucity of contemporary evidence and modern research into the subject, it is clear that Muslims constituted a not-inconsiderable portion of the Africans who were carted to the Americas as slaves from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Some scholarship has placed the number as high as one-fifth of all slaves, while more conservative analyses suggest only that in the United States “their numbers were significant, probably reaching into the thousands.”¹⁴⁸ Whatever their numbers, Muslim slaves were undoubtedly present in the United States, perhaps because West Africans were specially targeted for work in American rice fields. Even George Washington listed among his taxable property two slaves dubiously recorded as “Fatimer” and “Little Fatimer.”¹⁴⁹ Because American slavery and Barbary captivity are coincidental and overlapping phenomena, better understanding how Americans approached—and overlooked—the relationship between the two institutions may be instructive. Indeed, many Barbary captivity writers did not address American slavery at any length, just as some slave owners themselves did not discern the trappings of Islamic faith in the devotions of their human chattel. As a rule, the Barbary captives were remarkably silent on the duplicity of continued slavery in America, but their failure to condemn the institution is singular, as many other Americans viewed both captivity and slavery as

¹⁴⁷ Grandin, *Empire of Necessity*, 79.

¹⁴⁸ Edward E. Curtis IV, ed., *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*, 2-3; John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169; Aminah Beverly McCloud, “Islam in America: The Mosaic” in *Religion and Immigration: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Experiences in the United States*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, et. al. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003), 159-60; Michael A. Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” *The Journal of Southern History* 60 (1994), 671-72.

¹⁴⁹ Mary V. Thompson, “Mount Vernon,” in *Encyclopedia of Muslim-American History*, ed. Edward E. Curtis IV, vol. 2. (New York: Facts on File, 2010), 392; quoted in Spellberg, *Thomas Jefferson’s Qur’an*.

forms of suffering worthy of attention. Indeed, the comparison was particularly powerful in the hands of abolitionists¹⁵⁰

One cause of the ignorance of slave owners may be that for West African Muslim slaves, time and distance obliterated once-familiar creeds, and the lines of race, religion, and ethnic origin sometimes grew confusingly tangled.¹⁵¹ In his Arabic-language account relating his slavery in the Carolinas, the West African-born Omar ibn Said (ca. 1770-1864) drew from both Qur'anic and biblical passages. Omar became something of a local celebrity, he read an Arabic bible and an English Qur'an, and "was regularly willing to reassure" visitors of the sincerity of his conversion.¹⁵² That did not stop him from opening his *Life* with the *bismillah* and a blessing for "our Lord Muhammad."¹⁵³ The Guinean grandee known as Job ben Solomon was captured and sold as a slave to Maryland in the 1730s, where he remained two years before his "clear Head" and fluency in Arabic helped him convince prominent Britons to intercede in his behalf. Job read an Arabic version of the New Testament "with a great deal of Care," and the lawyer who first took notice of Job's plight recorded that "'tis known he was a *Mahometan*, but more moderate . . . than most of that Religion are."¹⁵⁴

Religious identity among slaves was further obfuscated when it was twinned with race, as in the notable case Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima. That Abd al-Rahman was a "Moor" was accepted as validation for the claim that he could not be a slave, for "not a

¹⁵⁰ Lotfi Ben Rejeb, "America's Captive Freemen in North Africa," *Slavery & Abolition* 9 (2008), 57-71.

¹⁵¹ Herbert Berg "African Americans," *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an Online* <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/african-americans-SIM_00010>.

¹⁵² Omar Ibn Said, *A Muslim American Slave: The Life of Omar Ibn Said*, ed. Ala Alryyes (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Bluett, *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon the High Priest of Boonda in Africa* (London: Richard Ford, 1734), 46-52.

drop of negro blood runs in his veins.”¹⁵⁵ While the scarcity of references to the Islamic faith of American slaves may be due in part to aloofness on the part of masters, another factor clouding historical perspective is that slave descriptions were often limited to physical characteristics that would aid in identification. The profit incentive driving the slave trade should not be overlooked as another cause of indifference. A 1794 British abolitionist tract quotes an “American slave-captain” on the death a “Mahometan” slave due to “the ‘*sulks*.’” Although the slave was “uncommonly well made, and seemed to be a person of consequence,” he refused to eat and became “very much cast down” when he was clapped in irons and crowded among other slaves. “He said, from the first, he was determined to die, and so he did ... I felt very sorry; for I dare say, I lost 300 dollars by his death.”¹⁵⁶

Among the Barbary captivity writers, race was rarely a central concern, and most captivity accounts are blind to slavery in the United States or otherwise refused to condemn the treatment of blacks in their homeland. After being wrecked on the coast of Oman, the white crew of Daniel Saunders’ ship stood idly by as their cook, a “black man from Boston,” was seized by Bedouin raiders. At the end of his narrative, Saunders was unable to account for the fate of the “black” Lascar sailors who had been aboard his vessel, though he offered that because they were “always accustomed to going naked, and living abstemiously it is supposed they suffered but little.”¹⁵⁷

Foss provides some small insight on race when notes the inhumane treatment of hospitalized, overworked Christians, whose deaths are “nothing more thought of, by the inhabitants, than the death of one of their domestic animals.” Incensed by the

¹⁵⁵ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 13-58, quoted at 20.

¹⁵⁶ Carl Wadström, *An Essay on Colonization, Particularly Applied to the Western Coast of Africa* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1794), 83-84.

¹⁵⁷ Saunders, *Journal*, 103-04.

captives' treatment, Foss relates the story of Scipio Jackson, "a blackman belonging to New-York." Jackson had been "low with the cholic," but a stint in the slave hospital financed by the Spanish granted him enough strength to pace about the room. Although doctors pleaded with a taskmaster that Jackson remained unfit for hard labor, the "merciless villain" persisted, lashing Jackson's feet and driving him to the marina. The "poor man" collapsed after half an hour's work, died that afternoon, and was buried before sundown. Foss tells his readers the story is clear proof of "the depth of the wretchedness of Christians, whom fortune has unhappily thrown into the hands of those detestable piratical barbarians." Foss execrates Muslims for considering Christians to be subhuman property, and in the process he identifies Jackson as both Christian and American. Unfortunately, Foss says nothing of Americans who treated their slaves in much the same way, and he never condemns American slaveholding.

However spotty the picture of Islam and slavery in the United States, the disparate thinking on Barbary captivity and domestic slavery did gall some Americans. Martha Jefferson in 1787 wrote to her "Papa," then minister to France, with news that a corsair had engaged an American vessel in a pitched battle lasting more than an hour. When the Americans seized the upper hand and boarded the "corser," they locked the Algerian crew in the chains that had been waiting for them, then:

returned to virginia from whence they are to go back to algers to change the prisoners to which if the algerians will not consent the poor creatures will be sold as slaves. Good god have we not enough? I wish with all my soul that the poor negroes were all freed. It greives my heart when I think that these our fellow creatures should be treated so terribly as they are by many of our country men.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ "To Thomas Jefferson From Martha Jefferson, 3 May 1787," *Founders Online, National Archives*. <<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-11-02-0316>>.

In his expansive *Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers*, James Wilson Stevens lamented that “the United States, emphatically called the land of liberty, swarm with those semi-barbarians who enthrall their fellow creatures without the least remorse. ... For it is manifest to the world, that we are equally culpable, and in whatever terms of opprobrium we may execrate the piratic disposition of the Africans, yet all our recriminations will recoil upon ourselves.”¹⁵⁹ Mathew Carey’s *Short Account of Algiers* likewise upbraided American slaveholders, warning that for the “systematic brutality” of buying and selling slaves, “we are not entitled to charge the Algerines with any exclusive degree of barbarity. The Christians of Europe and America carry on this commerce an hundred times more extensively than the Algerines.”¹⁶⁰ Although John Foss copied large passages of his *Journal* from Carey’s *Account*, such condemnation of slavery was left on the cutting room floor. Few Barbary captivity writers turned their pens to American slavery at all, and a vanishingly small number of them evolved bolder stances the American slavery system. After his 1815 shipwreck in West Africa, James Riley survived his captivity after a Moroccan slave trader took pity on him and redeemed him. The trader perished in the desert while searching for other American captives. Inspired by the reformed slave trader, Riley used his phenomenally popular captivity narrative as a platform to advocate for uprooting “the accursed tree of slavery, that has been suffered to take such deep root in our otherwise highly-favoured soil.”¹⁶¹

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¹⁵⁹ Stevens, *An Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers*, 234-35.

¹⁶⁰ Carey, *A Short Account of Algiers*, 16.

¹⁶¹ James Riley, *An Authentic Narrative of the Loss of the American Brig Commerce* (Hartford: Riley, 1817), 446-47.

C. Captives or slaves?

Many captivity writers did call themselves slaves, and they tended to treat the terms captivity and slavery interchangeably. Foss, for example, opened a letter to his mother by declaring: “I AM a slave to the Mahometans.”¹⁶² Indeed among the most commonly quoted expression of slavery among those held in Algiers was Laurence Sterne’s declaration on slavery made in 1768: “Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still slavery! said I—still thou art a bitter draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou art no less bitter on that account.”¹⁶³ Treating slavery as a deprivation of liberty may explain the broad appeal of captivity and slavery themes among Americans who lived with the memory of a revolution that was often framed as a rebellion against slavery to the British.¹⁶⁴ The sort of oppression American colonists expounded, that of an overbearing British government, bore little actual resemblance to that endured by blacks in the American South or even by sailors in North Africa. Promiscuous usage of the term slave may not necessarily suggest captivity writers found equivalency between themselves and the men and women who labored on southern plantations or cane fields in Haiti, but the discursive value of the terms did prompt some Americans to treat Barbary captivity and American slavery together. The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, for example, expanded its mission to include Barbary captivity in 1788.¹⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 pushed the frontier westward while prohibiting slavery within the new territories. Representatives of the Ohio Territory would later petition Congress in a semantically

¹⁶² “Extract of a letter from Mr. John Foss . . .,” *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), 5 August, 1795.

¹⁶³ Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 112.

¹⁶⁴ See the discussion of the American federal seal below.

¹⁶⁵ Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 84.

entangled memorial seeking “the releasement from slavery of such of the citizens of the United States, as are now in captivity at Algiers.”¹⁶⁶

Scholars generally refer to the Europeans and later Americans who manned galleys and worked in the quarries of North Africa as captives, not slaves. Robert Davis has protested that this is “a seemingly innocuous semantic shift, but one that is freighted with implications.”¹⁶⁷ For all the complications and reductions necessitated by that shift, it remains apparent that Barbary captivity and American slavery were different species of oppression. Some Americans held in North Africa clearly did endure lashings, punishments, and brutality not dissimilar from those meted out by the slave drivers of the Americas, but the broader social status enjoyed by Americans and Europeans captured at sea makes the comparison with American slaves difficult to maintain. Unlike black slaves in the United States, American captives in Algiers had good reason to expect they would be redeemed. Theirs was a temporary status precipitated by the economic incentive for ransoming, and their labor was in some sense a byproduct, not the principal objective, of their captivity. As George Washington recorded in his diary five years after the first Americans were captured and brought to Algiers, “it is more for the sake of the ransom than for the labour, that they make Slaves of the Prisoners.”¹⁶⁸ By the 1790s plague and the redemptions of other nations had reduced Algiers’ slave population and driven up the value of the Americans there, but the men would not have,

¹⁶⁶ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic, 1763-89*, 14th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 113-16; *House Journal*. 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 4 April, 1794, 112-13.

¹⁶⁷ Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2003), 12.

¹⁶⁸ “March 23, 1790,” Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Diaries of George Washington*, vol. 6, *The Papers of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 51.

as Foss purports to have feared, “the awful sentence, of Slavery for life, passed upon us.”¹⁶⁹

When Samuel Calder, the master of the schooner *Jay*, wrote to his shipping company that he would have forwarded a “regular Protest, but ... I suppose one from a Slave would be of no importance,” it is doubtful he intended for his letter to imply his station equaled that of slaves in the American south. The term’s value, it seems, lay merely in evoking the abjection of slavery, not in its specific dimensions.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, the captives enjoyed a surprising degree of free movement. Some turned to theft or ran after-hours businesses, by which means both “disorderly” captives and “mechanics” could improve their lot in the *bagnios* with more agreeable rooms and better food. For some, the freedom allowed an opportunity to “indemnify themselves for the loss of their liberty” by becoming merchants, and the business opportunities were apparently immense. The obstreperous and self-serving James Leander Cathcart financed his after-hours business with money borrowed from the Swedish consul and the Dey himself. Cathcart’s three slave taverns turned such a handsome profit that he left Algiers at the Dey’s bidding in a ship he had purchased and outfitted himself—a personal expense he could easily afford by which prompted him to vent his spleen nonetheless.¹⁷¹

A French priest who sailed to North Africa to redeem captives in the early eighteenth century refuted the harsh depictions of Algerian captivity then circulating in Europe; he said that some redeemed captives wished “they had lost a Limb rather than have bought their Liberty ... not to lose the Privileges of a Slave!”¹⁷² An appeal to the

¹⁶⁹ Allison has argued that Barbary captivity provided a means of integrating kinless strangers into North African society. Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 141.

¹⁷⁰ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 57-58.

¹⁷¹ Cathcart, *The Captives*, 77-78, 157.

¹⁷² Philémon de La Motte, *Several Voyages to Barbary*, second ed., trans. Joseph Morgan (London: Olive Payne, 1736), 46.

directors of the South Sea Company in behalf of captive Britons ashamedly observed that “many” private slave owners in Ottoman North Africa were “more kind and merciful” to Christian captives than Europeans “who call themselves *Christians*, are to their *Apprentices* and *Servants*.”¹⁷³ As if to allay any doubts over the brutality of his experiences, Foss notes that because of his “severe captivity,” he was forced to write “in the night, while in the *Bagnio* or prison, after our daily labour was over ... merely to amuse & relieve my mind from the dismal reflections which naturally occurred.”¹⁷⁴

However the captives viewed their experiences, their being fettered with the “galling chain” constituted a profitable means for Algiers and the other Barbary States to dispose of the captives until their relations or governments paid for their redemption. The terms of their captivity were undeniably cruel, but these captives’ principal importance to Algiers lay in their value to facilitate treaty negotiations and attract redemption money. The galley had in previous centuries required the forced labor of state-owned slaves as rowers. By the time of Foss’s captivity, however, the introduction of new rigging methods had eliminated the need for these galley slaves. Like slaves in the Americas, captured sailors held privately were sometimes rented out for farm work, but all the Americans held in Algiers could reliably anticipate that their government would eventually redeem them—if they could survive the incidental dangers posed by manual labor and recurrent bouts of plague.¹⁷⁵ The same could not be said for African slaves in the Americas.

¹⁷³ Thomas Pocock, *The Relief of Captives, Especially of our Own Countrymen* (London: Thomas Bickerton, 1720), 23.

¹⁷⁴ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 5-6.

¹⁷⁵ As Davis writes, the redemption work of the Trinitarians and the Mercedarians enticed the capture of European sailors merely for ransom and without the intention to use them for labor. For these reasons, the present study will adhere to the general academic standard of referring to the Americans in Algiers as captives, except where otherwise labelled in primary material. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, 177.

D. Slaves and the political sphere

The connection between American captives in North Africa and African slaves in the United States sometimes did arise in the political sphere. John Adams suggested a link between the existence of slavery on both sides of the Atlantic while writing to English abolitionist Granville Sharp in 1786. The slave trade, Adams said, would “never, never . . . be abolished, while Christian princes abase themselves before the piratical ensigns of Mahomet.”¹⁷⁶ American abolitionists used Barbary captivity as a foil for slaveholding in their own country. Benjamin Franklin famously lampooned a congressional slavery apologist by writing in the guise of Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, a fictional member of the Algerian Divan who opposed freeing the Christians in North Africa. The grandee demanded, “If we forbear to make Slaves of their People, who in this hot Climate are to cultivate our Lands? Who are to perform the common Labours of our City, and in our Families? Must we not then be our own Slaves?”¹⁷⁷ The criticism presages remarks Foss attributed to Dey Hasan Bashaw. As plague threatened Algiers and the Swedish consul, Matthias Skjoldebrand, offered to pay the regency for lost time while sheltering American captives outside the city, the Dey purportedly protested, “Does the American Government suppose, I am going to do my work myself, when I have so many slaves; or do they think to make an Ass of me, by hiring my slaves, to live in idleness. No while they have life, they shall work, and if they die with the plague, it will be my loss, not theirs!”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ “John Adams to Granville Sharp, 8 March 1786,” *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 8, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1853), 387-88.

¹⁷⁷ “Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim on the Slave Trade,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 23 March, 1790.

¹⁷⁸ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 129.

Barbary captivity remained a useful discursive tool for American abolitionists long after its real threat had become a distant memory. Perhaps the most noteworthy deployment of the image of Americans in chains came from Senator Charles Sumner in an 1847 speech and 1853 book sharing the name *White Slavery in the Barbary States*. Using an examination of European and American captives in North Africa as a critique of American slaveholding, Sumner observed that geography, climate, and “character” invite the “singular and suggestive comparison” between North Africa and what he called “the *Barbary States of America*.”¹⁷⁹

During the Federal Period some Americans clearly did recognize the duplicity of excoriating North African captivity while so many slaves languished within the borders of the United States. During his presidency, John Quincy Adams gratified the request of the Pasha of Morocco by emancipating the “Moor” Abd al-Rahman Ibrahim. Although the freed slave was West African, not a Moor, the American consul at Tangier—perhaps anticipating future Barbary captives—hoped that “his liberty would give me an important power.”¹⁸⁰ Thomas Jefferson, for one, mooted exchanging African Muslim slaves for American captives in North Africa, but this idea never achieved takeoff.¹⁸¹ It is impossible to know if such an exchange would have eased American negotiations in North Africa, but its effect in domestic politics may offer a clue explaining why the two institutions were not treated together more often. In Louisiana four days before the 1828 election, a handbill circulated comparing Andrew Jackson, “A MAN OF THE SOUTH, A SLAVE HOLDER, A COTTON PLANTER,” with Adams, who was accused of arousing “the prejudices of your Northern brethren against the SOUTH” through his

¹⁷⁹ Sumner, *White Slavery in the Barbary States*, 10-12.

¹⁸⁰ GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 18-27.

¹⁸¹ Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 3.

intercession in behalf of the famous “emancipated NEGRO,” Abd al-Rahman.¹⁸² Abd al-Rahman’s religion, it seems, was subsidiary to his race and political expediency, and Jackson won a tilted electoral victory.

E. Congress and captivity

On January 20, 1794, the House of Representatives took up both “Algerine Affairs” and the Atlantic slave trade. That day the House heard a Quaker petition urging it to outlaw Americans from transporting slaves to the West Indies. Later in the same session it passed the Slave Trade Act, the first major legislation limiting the import of slaves into the United States. The same day on which the House read the Quaker petition, however, it also mooted an act to fortify American ports and harbors against attack by “surprise by naval armaments,” and it received a War Department assessment of Algerian naval strength that was prompted by fears of piracy and captivity.¹⁸³ Congress shirked its endemic resistance to militarization and the unilateral authority of the executive by voting to fortify sixteen ports and granting the president *carte blanche* to garrison troops there “as he may judge necessary.”¹⁸⁴ It is tempting to see these issues arising side-by-side as evidence that some eighteenth-century congressmen may have connected Barbary captivity to the slave trade when assessing the institution. The language deployed on the House floor at the time and in official correspondence does suggest at least a cursory equivalence between the two in the minds of some Americans.

As with other memorialists, a number of women petitioned Congress in 1794 for the

¹⁸² GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America*, 20-21.

¹⁸³ *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 249-50 and 483-84; *American State Papers: House of Representatives* 1:5-6; *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 1:61-65.

¹⁸⁴ Congress greatly expanded the provisions of this act in 1798 when it apportioned \$250,000 for further port fortification. *An Act to provide for the Defence of certain Ports and Harbors in the United States*, March 20, 1794, ch. 9, *Stat.* 1.

ransom “or relief from slavery, of their husbands, and other citizens of the United States, who are now in captivity at Algiers.”¹⁸⁵ Whatever the connection that may have formed between the two institutions, however, the record of debate largely belies the suggestion that slavery in the United States played a significant role in the congressional response to Barbary captivity.

As the January War Department report grew into the Naval Act of 1794, congressmen mooted paying Portugal to suppress Algiers, questioned the availability of suitable timber for building deterrent warships, worried over the snowballing “monstrous expense” of maintaining a naval office, and wondered whether American naval buildup would precipitate war with European powers and all of North Africa. So far as Congressional records relate, however, the moral duplicity of continued American slaveholding did not play a role in the debate.¹⁸⁶ Interestingly, the fate of the Barbary captives themselves seem to have been a distant afterthought behind such issues as the “national dishonor” of contracting a foreign navy, the fear of oppression through “extensiveness of the Government,” and the commercial dangers of unchecked piracy.¹⁸⁷ In the final emotional appeal before the Naval Act went to a vote, William Loughton Smith did protest—as his *fourth* point in support for the bill—that “the slavery of our fellow-citizens” constituted a “national disgrace ... beyond all calculation. Who could, after reading the affecting narratives of Captain Penrose and the other unfortunates, sit down contented with cold calculations and dry syllogisms?”¹⁸⁸

The Virginian William Branch Giles resented the “imputation upon the humanity of the

¹⁸⁵ *House Journal*. 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 5 March, 1794, 82.

¹⁸⁶ *The Annals of Congress*, otherwise known as *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*, is the official record of the earliest Congressional debates under the Constitution. The multiple volumes provide summary transcripts compiled from contemporary records, principally newspapers accounts.

¹⁸⁷ *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 431-42, 459, 485-98.

¹⁸⁸ *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 495.

opposers of the bill” and contended that no supporter of the captives could endorse it. Giles doubted the proposed frigates would perform their expected “wonders upon the water ... boldly march upon the land, and break the chains of the prisoners.” Giles sympathized with the captives, but he feared the bill would make all Americans captives of expanding government, while allowing a nascent American navy to retrain its sights on “conquest.”

Perhaps congressmen took it for granted that their colleagues sympathized with the American captives in Algiers, but the focus on pecuniary matters in congressional debate suggests that federal coffers, not captives, were the principal focal point of debate on the House floor. To the extent that legislation treated Barbary captives and American slaves disparately, Congress did express cognitive dissonance, but when it took up the “Difficulty with Algiers,” it did so principally in terms of commerce and security, not conscience. Whatever purchase antislavery movements may have gained through reference to Barbary captivity, the specter of raids on American shores and predation upon maritime commerce commanded political attention in a way the plight of enslaved blacks did not. Despite the fears of debt and military formation, commercial and security interests carried the day and the bill passed 50-39, resurrecting the American navy.¹⁸⁹

F. The navy and its hierarchy

Though American sailors held captive in Algiers complained of starvation, they would avoid it—in theory—aboard the naval vessels requisitioned under the Naval Act of 1794. The act outlined that each sailor would receive a daily ration of one pound of

¹⁸⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 3rd Cong., 1st sess., 497-98.

bread, at least one pound of beef or pork, half a pint of vegetables, garnishes such as butter or molasses, and either one quart of beer or half a pint of “distilled spirits[!]”¹⁹⁰ On paper, if not necessarily in practice, the Americans would demonstrate their magnanimity towards the common sailor. Although antinomianism and populism had been factors in the Revolutionary moment, by the Federalist Era the American government had asserted top-down control through increasingly entrenched institutions and processes. Citizens outside the elite, particularly the sailors, dockworkers, and allied tradespeople of the “Atlantean proletariat” set, were among those most highly disaffected by these changes.¹⁹¹

In this context, it has been suggested that the Barbary captivity account served as a “mirror with which to critique the integrity of democracy in the new republic.”¹⁹² Many captives groused over governmental neglect, and many invoked their belief that the Revolution was fought with the explicit goal of freeing Americans from bondage and in order to establish a government more responsive to the people. James Leander Cathcart groused that “no class of men suffered ... the consequences” of the Revolution as acutely as the American captives in Algiers. Meantime, the Algerian corsairs apparently did feel some affinity for their fellow seaman. Cathcart records his sympathetic treatment by the “venerable old Arab” who captured him.¹⁹³ Foss, meanwhile, noted that when the captives unloaded and outfitted vessels in the harbor,

¹⁹⁰ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 70.

¹⁹¹ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 102, 236-40.

¹⁹² Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 19.

¹⁹³ Cathcart, *The Captives*, 27-28, 6.

the stewards “oftentimes” provided them “a little sweet oil, and sometimes some olives, this they count a feast.”¹⁹⁴

American sailors like Foss did face the harsh reality of entrenched social distinctions, as naval officers and the masters of commercial vessels enjoyed the privileges of a stratified hierarchy. The American government recognized such divisions with the top-heavy pay scale of its allowances for the captives in Algiers, but the Algerians did not. Among the grievances master Moses Morse related to his employers was that “without the least Distinction [he] was put into the Hardest Labour.”¹⁹⁵ As one of the frequent bouts of the plague threatened Algiers, “sundry captive American captains” wrote to Congress requesting the money necessary “to have a house taken for the residence of the American masters and mates, and, if possible, the mariners, to shield them from the threatening storm of mortality and danger.”¹⁹⁶ Tensions over social hierarchies appeared even more unvarnished a decade later when the frigate *Philadelphia* ran aground off the coast of Tripoli and its 300-strong crew surrendered the vessel and went ashore as captives. The Tripolitans granted preferential treatment to the ship’s officers, who were allowed to recreate themselves in the countryside while the rest of the men took their exercise in the form of hard labor. The ranking captives enjoyed such leisure that one officer wrote plaintively to a friend that the Pasha’s garden was “not laid out with any taste, and the flowers in it, are of the most common sort.” The orange groves, on the other hand, he found “delightful beyond what you can imagine ... we loll two or three hours under the shade of the orange trees, enjoying the cheerful fresh air, and feasting upon the most delicious fruits.”¹⁹⁷ The *Philadelphia*

¹⁹⁴ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 27.

¹⁹⁵ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 87.

¹⁹⁶ Carey, *A Short Account of Algiers*, 42.

¹⁹⁷ *New York Evening Post* 2 Oct. 1804, quoted in Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 116.

surgeon Jonathan Cowdery became a favorite of the Pasha, and his aloof and leisurely account of Tripoli bore little testament to the harsh conditions the majority of the captive sailors endured. This appalled mariner William Ray, who wrote his vituperative *Horrors of Slavery, or the American Tars in Tripoli* in part as a corrective to Cowdery's patrician reading of the experience. Ray seethed, "when the Doctor says *we*, it is the very same as if he had said *we officers only*; for he does not think proper to descend to the task of relating how the crew were provided for, or whether they were but half alive or all dead."¹⁹⁸

Beyond the oppressive naval hierarchies of their own navy, Americans in Foss's time continued to face the threat of impressment into the British Royal Navy. Men like Joshua Penny and James M'Lean wrote accounts that testified to the possibility of Americans being impressed by the British even thirty years after the Revolution had ended. Indeed, as Foss and his fellow captives sailed from Algiers, a zealous Captain Smith of the Royal Navy boarded the vessel carrying the Americans and brought them to Elba for "adjudication." Smith separated the already beggared men from the stores aboard their impounded vessel "in order to reduce us to necessity" and force them to volunteer for the Royal Navy. When the men refused to serve the Crown, Smith impressed one George Tilley "under pretence [*sic.*] of his being an Englishman." Three other men changed their minds and joined voluntarily. Foss detested the behavior of the British, but he ruefully listed the names of his turncoat countrymen who had entered into "his Britannic Majesty's service."¹⁹⁹ Avoiding further trouble, Foss and the

¹⁹⁸ William Ray, *Horrors of Slavery, or the American Tars in Tripoli* (Troy, NY: Oliver Lyon, 1808), 81.

¹⁹⁹ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 150-51.

remaining Americans, who had “been robbed of the greatest part of our cloaths and all our money by the captors,” eventually found passage to Leghorn and continued home.

Foss found impressment galling, and his description of the British plundering bears a striking resemblance to his first encounter with the Algerians. Although it astounded Foss to see it, national identity for some American captives was apparently subsidiary to simple expediency. In addition to the Americans who volunteered for the Royal Navy were eleven American captives who begged the intercession of King George III in 1786. Their letter explained “the separate Circumstances that Obliged them Unfortunately to serve under American Colours,” though they remained “your Majesty’s Dutifull and Loyall Subjects.” Interestingly, the name of the self-proclaimed patriot and future American consul James Leander Cathcart appears on the list, along with a claim that as a 20-year-old he “served his time out of London.”²⁰⁰ If Cathcart’s memoir is to be believed, he did spend time on British ships, but inasmuch as he “served,” it was as a prisoner of war to the British during the Revolution.²⁰¹ Foss’s brushes with impressment illustrate the subjection of life at sea in the late eighteenth century, and they indicate some of the pratfalls awaiting American sailors. In light of the eighteenth-century class affinities transcending national borders, it bears noting that middling Britons may have faced some of the same troubles. Thomas Pellow, a long-time captive in Morocco, relates that on his return to Britain he appealed to naval commissioners for an audience with King George II, “though all I could get from them at the last was the very extraordinary favour of a hammock on board of a man-of-war.”²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 220-22.

²⁰¹ Cathcart, *The Captives*, iii.

²⁰² Thomas Pellow, *The Adventures of Thomas Pellow*, reprint (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890), 326.

The ideological paradigms evoked by captivity factored heavily in American self-identification from the earliest days of the planting of the New World. Captivity arose in a distinctly American context as early as 1625, although early colonists also inherited a legacy of captivity experiences from their British forebears. These collective experiences—along with the history of Indian captivity—exercised a heavy influence on the narrative accounts of American Barbary captives. This burgeoning literary form catered to a general American interest in Islam in the late eighteenth century, and many Americans drew natural parallels between the experiences of these Barbary captives and the experiences of slaves in the United States. At its core, the Barbary captivity account expressed many of the ideologies central to American identity by mooting institutional hierarchies and the social standing of marginalized individuals who belonged to a putatively level, democratic society.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRECEDENT FOR SUFFERING

There is nothing more common than to confound the terms of the American revolution with those of the late American war. The American war is over: but this is far from being the case with the American revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed. It remains yet to establish and perfect our new forms of government; and to prepare the principles, morals, and manners of our citizens, for these forms of government, after they are established and brought to perfection.²⁰³

* * *

In respect to the *local* introduction of this kingdom or dominion into the world ... Common sense seems to unite with the decisions of impartial wisdom, and to declare, that this *first-born* of the nations, to the enjoyment of natural and civil liberty, must be also, by analogy of providence, the *first-born* of the nations in the favors of grace.²⁰⁴

The political and religious ideologies coming into force at the turn of the nineteenth century provided structures of meaning to many of those living in a rapidly changing United States. Although some Americans were by the 1790s beginning to view their national fortunes with mounting optimism, such a roseate outlook complemented a traditional Christian embrace of pain, humiliation, and suffering that had mediated much of the early American experience. A religiously defined teleology aided the community and the individual sufferer by assuring them of their divinely apportioned rewards. At its core, an afflictive model of progress affirmed that just as Christ emerged victorious in the face of his sufferings, the Christian church, along with God's chosen people would enjoy ultimate triumph, however unnerving their setbacks.

Indeed, Christian hermeneutics supplied Americans with models that not only rationalized, but in fact required that they endure suffering and humiliation. They traced

²⁰³ Benjamin Rush, "Address to the People of the United States," *Friends of the Constitution: Writings of the "Other" Federalists 1787–1788*, eds. Gary L. McDowell and Colleen A. Sheehan (Indianapolis: LibertyFund, 1998), 1-7.

²⁰⁴ David Austin, *The Voice of God to the People of These United States, By a Messenger of Peace* (Elizabethtown: Shepard Kollock, 1796), 11.

the precedent for this affliction to Christ, as well as their self-appointed forebears, ancient Israel. Armed with a superseding covenant through Christ, American Separatists viewed their planting of the New World as another exodus. Although escaping the bonds of cruel oppression in the Old World, these planters embraced the new forms of struggle incumbent upon their flight.²⁰⁵ The frisson of the eighteenth century, particularly the upending religious fervor of the Great Awakening and the inward- and outward-looking political tensions of the Revolution, rekindled these themes and gave rise to a more clearly defined American mission, with some Americans conceiving of their nation as being uniquely fitted by God to play a special role in the End Times. Rising national fortunes in the 1790s buoyed the expectant hopes of many Americans and birthed a wide range of new interpretations of biblical promises regarding the character and initiation of Christ's earthly kingdom. A growing number of Americans reflecting on the Second Coming during this period rejected the traditional doctrine of the world's sinful decline and the destruction of Armageddon. Many infused the End Times chronology with the secular optimism that was coming to define affairs as diverse as science, education, commerce, and government. Not only did Americans effuse over the glories of Christ's earthly kingdom, but for many individuals, religious optimism became twinned with political expectations. Emblematic of this is the compendious *View of Religions* in which Hannah Adams undertook a minute comparison of prevailing theories on the millennium. She dedicated her study to then-Vice President John Adams, hoping he would live to see "your country crowned with increasing success, and the sentiments of liberty, which you have cultivated in America,

²⁰⁵ Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 26-27.

extending their benign influence through the world.”²⁰⁶ American views of the world to come during the millennial period of Christ’s reign differed wildly, yet the signs laid bare by events at home and across the globe convinced many that the final consummation of God’s plan for humanity was near at hand.

A. Typology

Early Americans faced humiliation in the myriad ways their nation addressed and failed to address Barbary captivity. Like Christians in generations before them, some Americans mediated their anxieties over these national setbacks by embracing the biblical hermeneutic of typology. Typology linked *types*—the divine truths that had eternally underlain God’s plan—with *antitypes*—their fulfillment, supersession, or embodiment. Far more potent than mere analogy, typology gave body and sinew to the search for harmony among scriptural precedents and contemporary events in colonial America and the early United States.²⁰⁷ The ideological tools thereby built “a dynamic social faith,” in Alan Heimert’s phrasing, by teasing out “a single and consistent meaning in the works of God, a pattern prophetic of things spiritual to come.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Hannah Adams, *A View of Religions ...*, second edition (Boston: John West Folsom, n.d.) 145-52.

²⁰⁷ Unlike allegory, which referenced a Platonic spiritual universe hidden beyond a mere representation in the inchoate physical universe, typology points to God’s eternal plan as made visible in the present and tangible manifestations of that design. Bercovitch contends that the typology of the Puritans’ “Yankee heirs” was characterized by metaphorical liberties that a firm scriptural grounding precluded, meaning “‘providence’ itself was shaken loose from its religious framework to become part of the belief in human progress,” Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 93. Mason I. Lowance, Jr., “‘Images or Shadows of Divine Things’ in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards,” in *Typology and Early American Literature*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 210.

²⁰⁸ Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind, from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 68 and 105-06. Typology in its earliest deployments had been a means of validating the Christ and the Gospels by reference to the authority of the Old Testament and its promises. Christ tells Nicodemus in John 3:14, for

American preachers and lay exegetes turned to scripture as they sought the manifold ways biblical history had adumbrated contemporary persons and events. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, “sacred history did not end, after all, with the Bible. ... Christ, the ‘antitype,’ stood at the center of history, casting His shadow forward to the end of time as well as backward across the Old Testament ... in an everlasting present.” This thinking “translates secular history, whether of individuals or communities, into spiritual biography.”²⁰⁹ Typology thereby confirmed the individual calling as well as that of the collective, including both “personal” and “national” types. Not only had John Winthrop been made *Nehemias Americanus*, but George Washington became the “American Joshua,” and the “Federal Constitution, the boast of man and the wonder of the world,” became the “Ark of our safety.”²¹⁰ Typology therefore validated the new errand into the American wilderness and the portentous events that followed.

So entrenched was covenantal rhetoric affirming the national calling that pastor Abiel Abbot remarked in 1799, “‘OUR AMERICAN ISRAEL,’ is a term frequently used; and common consent allows it apt and proper.”²¹¹ Myriad equivalent usages, such as the mantle of “Republican Israel” reveal a mode of thinking that drew on familiar biblical references to ameliorate and explain the suffering and humiliation experienced by early Americans like the Barbary captives. Like the Israelites of old, the covenant and God’s invigilation did not preclude great turmoil and suffering. In fact, the type of ancient Israel *mandated* suffering, and the existence of hardship thereby confirmed Americans’ selection by God.²¹² As Ernest Tuveson writes, the trials endured by early

example, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.”

²⁰⁹ Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins*, 35-40; quoted at 36.

²¹⁰ Elijah Parish, *An Oration Delivered at Byfield* (Newburyport: Angier March, 1799), 5.

²¹¹ Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance*, 6.

²¹² Bercovitch, *American Jeremiad*, 118-128.

Americans became the “means of attaining strength,” and the righteous would necessarily be bowed in humility before their ultimate triumph.²¹³ John Adams offers a glimpse of such thinking in a letter he wrote on the eve of independence, saying “It may be the Will of Heaven” that the nation should “suffer Calamities still more wasting and Distresses yet more dreadfull. ... The Furnace of Affliction produces Refinement, in States as well as Individuals.” Far from nullifying the grand design, the anticipated perturbations confirmed the ultimate cogency of the national mission. A self-proclaimed “church-going animal,” Adams would echo John Winthrop by declaring in 1780 that Europe’s keen attention to the Revolution confirmed that “America is the City, set upon a Hill.”²¹⁴

Biblically inflected images of captivity and suffering remained potent in Foss’s time more than a decade later. Preaching on the national day of thanksgiving in 1795, pastor Isaac Story invoked the Israelites’ oppression as he imagined Algiers in the type of ancient Egypt. The parallels between the United States and ancient Israel abound in Story’s observation that the pharaoh had harshly oppressed the Israelites and resorted to drowning male children for fear they would:

become more powerful than the Egyptians ... and ... reinstate themselves in the rights and privileges of freemen, to no small loss of their lords and masters. His first project was by heavy burdens to depress their spirits, and diminish their population; but perceiving that they still flourished, he determined upon this last and cruel expedient.²¹⁵

²¹³ Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 2-4.

²¹⁴ Though often understood only through Winthrop’s sermon, the whole of Matthew 5:14 reads: “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.” “John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 28 August 1811,” *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 9, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1854), 635-40; “John Adams to Abigail Adams, 3 July 1776,” *Letters during Continental Congress, August 1774-1777*, manuscript, from Massachusetts Historical Society, The Adams Family Papers. <<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/diary/>>; “From John Adams to Nathanael Greene, 18 March 1780,” *Founders Online, National Archives*. <<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-09-02-0041>>.

²¹⁵ Isaac Story, *A Discourse* (Salem: Thomas C. Cushing, 1795), 5.

“Suitable instruments,” Story continued, rose from among the “lowest grades in life” for the fulfillment of God’s plan in the Federalist Era as well as in Ancient Egypt. Casting the American nation as the just inheritor of ancient Israel’s covenant was de rigueur in some eighteenth-century American religious circles, but the invocation of Egyptian captivity is particularly telling, for in some circles it powerfully defined a mode of afflictive progress and presaged the dawning of a new age. As Story preached, after Americans redeemed their captive “fellow-citizens in America” and executed their other religious obligation, God would admit them “as qualified denizens in the new Jerusalem above.”²¹⁶ The religious dimensions of such eschatology will be explored more fully below, but first it is critical to recognize how the typology appropriating ancient Israel and suffering generally appealed to both exegetes and secular Americans.

In the final days of Foss’s captivity, the diplomat Joel Barlow secured a loan through the house of Micaiah Baccri (whom Foss identified as “a Jew belonging to the Regency”). The Americans would not be set free until the money arrived, however, and Foss relates that Barlow warned the captives not to place too much store in their expected liberation, for “the heart of your Pharoah [*sic.*] may be again hardened.”²¹⁷ Foss found a similar consonance, for he reports another instance in which a Corsican, who was a captive along with his father and six brothers, was mortally wounded in the quarry. Upon hearing of the accident, the Dey’s “obdurate heart was a little softened,” and he permitted the father to visit the son on his deathbed.²¹⁸ Not only did Foss capitalize on the covenantal significance of the Exodus, but he also played on its association with persecution by linking the Algerians to Ishmael, the first-born son of

²¹⁶ Story, *Traits of Resemblance*, 14.

²¹⁷ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 142.

²¹⁸ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 43.

Abraham. He quotes Genesis 16:12 when describing the American captives' fear they would be slaves for life, for "What else could we expect or even hope from a ferocious absolute Monarch, like Hassan Bashaw, one of the genuine children of Ishmael, whose 'hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him.'" ²¹⁹ Leveraging this long-standing Christian polemic against Muslims as descendants of Ishmael, Foss arrived at a characterization that injected his experiences with covenantal meaning.

B. Deliverance

The mythos of captivity and deliverance penetrated the American consciousness so deeply that when Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson convened on July 4, 1776 to recommend imagery for the federal seal, each of the designs they proposed drew on themes of deliverance. ²²⁰ Among their proposals were two seals that invoked Exodus and the type of a persecuted chosen people heeding a divine injunction. Franklin suggested that the seal depict Moses overlooking the Red Sea as Pharaoh's army is overwhelmed in the churning waters separating them from the fleeing Israelites. It called for "Rays from a Pillar of Fire in the Clouds reaching to Moses, to express that he acts by Command of the Deity." Paying obeisance to the king of kings, some early Americans observed their inheritance of a providential mission, and in this vein the "Device" carried the motto "*Rebellion to Tyrants Is Obedience to God.*" ²²¹ With a greater emphasis on the obstacles and suffering that follow the release

²¹⁹ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 141.

²²⁰ U.S Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, *The Great Seal of the United States*. <<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/27807.pdf>>.

²²¹ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. William B. Wilcox, vol. 22 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 562-63; and *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Worthington C. Ford, et al., vol. 5 (Washington, D.C., 1904-37), 690-91. This Jeffersonian motto resurfaced when it was stamped onto the 1,200-pound "Mammoth Cheshire Cheese"

from captivity, Jefferson called for the seal to depict “the children of Israel in the wilderness, led by a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night.”²²² Like the Israelites who were beset on all sides by danger and temptation, America would heed a divine calling as it forged a path through the wilderness.

Scholars of American Barbary captivity literature have keenly observed how the biblical themes of deliverance, liberation, and travail attested to the symbolic presence of oppression and captivity underwriting eighteenth-century American self-identification, both from the popularity of Indian captivity and as an immanent component of British colonial rule.²²³ The theme proposed by Adams, however, has attracted less attention. Adams’ suggestion hewed to classical rather than biblical imagery, but it too shares the dualism of the biblical covenants. Adams described his Herculean motif as “The Hero resting on his Clubb. Virtue pointing to her rugged Mountain, on one Hand, and perswading him to ascend. Sloth, glancing at her flowery Paths of Pleasure, wantonly reclining on the Ground, displaying the Charms both of her

presented to the third president by the people of Cheshire, Massachusetts in 1802. Accompanying the cheese was a memorial declaring it to be the product of “the personal labor of *Freeborn Farmers* with the voluntary and cheerful aid of their wives and daughters without the assistance of a single slave.” Its makers admitted it was “not the last stone of the Bastille, nor is it an article of great pecuniary worth,” but it was undoubtedly an article of curious guerilla politicking that recognized the gravest shortcoming of the Revolutionary promise. C.A. Browne, “John Leland and the Mammoth Cheshire Cheese,” *Agricultural History* 18 (1994), 149-50; Sylvanus Urban, “Correspondence of Sylvanus Urban: The great Cheshire Political Cheese,” *The Gentleman’s Gazette* 227 (1869), 634-40; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 96.

²²² “John Adams to Abigail Adams, 14 August 1776,” *Letters during Continental Congress, August 1774–1777*, manuscript, from Massachusetts Historical Society, *The Adams Family Papers*. <<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/diary/>>.

²²³ James Leander Cathcart “thought it impossible that a nation just emerged from slavery herself would abandon the men who had fought for in independence to an ignominious captivity in Barbary.” Cathcart, *The Captives*, 27. See also: Baepler, *White Slaves*, 24; and Hilton Obenzinger, *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 29.

Eloquence and Person, to seduce him into Vice.”²²⁴ Adams believed the nation would advance and spread the useful knowledge neglected by the tired Old World from which the American planters had fled. He had written as early as 1765 that he viewed the settlement of America with “Reverence and Wonder” as the “as the Opening of a grand scene and Design in Providence, for the Illumination of the Ignorant and the Emancipation of the slavish Part of Mankind all over the Earth.”²²⁵ America, he foresaw, would prop up the world through the tireless application of its genius, but only if its citizens, like Hercules, faced judgment and chose virtuous hardship over the empty low road.

The proposal the committee ultimately advanced was the Exodus motif suggested by Franklin, but it failed to win congressional backing. Several additional committees and more than a dozen men would apply themselves to the project before Congress adopted a federal seal in 1782. The seal that Congress did adopt depicted, in a now-familiar form, the American bald eagle clutching the olive branch and a bundle of arrows in its talons, but the departure from overtly biblical symbolism did not prevent Americans from teasing providential meaning out of the seal. The mottos appearing on the reverse, *Annuit Cœptis* and *Novus Ordo Seclorum* (translated by the U.S. Mint as “He [God] (*sic.*) has favored our undertaking” and “A New Order of the Ages”), suggested what the Bureau of Printing and Engraving called “the beginning of the new

²²⁴ “John Adams to Abigail Adams, 14 August 1776,” compare with Deuteronomy 30:15: “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil,” or Deuteronomy 11:26: “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse.”

²²⁵ Adams imagined no people had lavished such attention on education since the ancient Egyptians. The egalitarian nature of American education so impressed Adams that he wrote: “All Ranks and orders of our People, are intelligent, are accomplished—a Native of America, especially of New England, who cannot read and wright is as rare a Phenomenon as a Comet.” *John Adams Diary 10, February 21, 1765*, manuscript, from Massachusetts Historical Society, *The Adams Family Papers*. <<http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/diary/>>.

American era in 1776.”²²⁶ The apoplectic New Jersey minister David Austin, for one, saw the new national symbol as the eagle of Revelation 12:14, bearing the persecuted woman away from the red dragon. Austin wrote in 1794, “the eagle, on whose wings the persecuted woman was born into the American wilderness . . . hath taken her station upon the broad seal of the United States; and from thence has perched upon the pediment of the first government-house, dedicated to the dominion of civil and religious liberty, where she is still to be seen, an emblem of the protection of Providence towards our present government, and towards this our happy land.”²²⁷ For Americans like Austin, who read the past, present, and future of their nation in the text of the Bible, the seal confirmed that the nation was advancing the consummation of God’s ultimate plan for humanity.

C. The glorious millennium

Like other Christians before them, many Americans of the late eighteenth century found comfort in the vague promises of the Second Coming as divined from the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and especially Revelation. Biblical exegesis rooted in these books—the latter two falling in the *apocalypse* genre because they reveal “secret knowledge”—had in general promoted patient acceptance of oppression, persecution, and even martyrdom. Traditional Christian apocalypticism foreclosed the possibility that human history would enjoy an arc of progressive advancement until the Second Coming. In the eyes of some American exegetes, any American national prosperity in

²²⁶ U.S. Mint, Bureau of Printing and Engraving, *Currency Note*.
<http://www.moneyfactory.gov/images/Currency_notes_508.pdf>.

²²⁷ David Austin, *The Millennium; or, the Thousand Years of Prosperity Promised to the Church of God in the Old Testament and in the New, Shortly to Commence* (Elizabethtown: Shepard Kollock, 1794), 409-15, quoted at 415.

the Federalist Era was an anomaly in light of the imminent End Times that would snuff it out. Newbury, Massachusetts pastor David Tappan preached in 1783 that the coming Apocalypse “threatens to eclipse, if not totally extinguish, that dawning light, which has begun to cheer and bless this western world.”²²⁸ Unlike Tappan, however, a growing number of American exegetes were unable to square this conventional mode of biblical interpretation with their views of the national climate beginning to prevail in the 1790s.

John Foss’s captivity in Algiers occurred during a period of meaningful transition in the political institutions and religious thought of the United States. With no navy to speak of and a continuing distrust of a standing army, Americans had myriad legitimate reasons to feel reluctant about their national prospects. Indeed, Barbary captivity remained a familiar institution in the minds of American sailors even in the early nineteenth century. Added to this was the yoke of Revolutionary War debts—the “price of liberty”—with only nascent plans for a national bank to effectively amortize them.²²⁹ A growing share of Americans mooting domestic affairs in the 1790s, however, began to dwell on the numerous signs that their national straits of the Critical Period of 1781 to 1789 had begun to pass. In the years between the declaration of independence in 1776 and the first census in 1790, a population of some two million colonists tied to London won a fitful independence, doubled in size, and became a magnet for immigration.²³⁰ A robust constitution superseded the congenitally infirm Articles of

²²⁸ David Tappan, *The question answered, Watchman, what of the night?* (Salem: Samuel Hall, 1783), 12-19.

²²⁹ *American State Papers: Finance* 1:15

²³⁰ Induced by cheap land and democratic government, immigrants spanned all classes, “from the chief magistrate down to the lowest plebian.—The independency of the United States of America, is in no one instance, perhaps, a greater blessing to the world, than in its being the asylum whither the indigent and oppressed, whom the lawless hand of European despotism would *crush to the earth*, can find succor and protection, and join *common* fellowship in a country, / Where happy millions their own fields possess, / No tyrant awes them, and no lords oppress.” “America,” *Times* (London) 1 December 1785; Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*:

Confederation, granting even the American captives of 1785 hope that Congress would have new powers to redeem them.²³¹ Closer to home, whereas the Crown had failed or refused to actively control the territories east of the Ohio River that it appropriated in 1763, the Americans beginning in 1784 actively administered government and erased federally assumed war debts with frontier land sales there. Through legal mechanisms, these undertakings seemingly enlarged American republican ideals by provisioning for proportional territorial legislatures, enshrining a legal system of jury trials, and banning slavery.²³² Meanwhile in the states, manufactories cropped up, and growing industry expanded the market for agricultural produce. International trade flourished in spite of the threat of piracy, and new markets opened as far away as China.²³³

As early as 1783, the preacher Ezra Stiles predicted that “navigation will carry the American flag around the globe itself,” spreading the useful arts and leading to a fulfillment of the Book of Daniel’s prophecy that “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” Meanwhile, germinal American ideals such as the freedom of religion were already finding fertile soil abroad, portending the “glory of the American empire.”²³⁴ A report made by John Adams in 1795 on behalf of the Senate noted that the peace with Algiers, a favorable treaty with Morocco, propitious negotiations with Spain, and stability on the western frontiers all bespoke the “numerous and widespread tokens of prosperity which in so peculiar a manner

A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2; U.S. Census Bureau, “Population, Housing Units, Area Measurements, and Density: 1790-1990.” <<http://www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/files/table-2.pdf>>.

²³¹ O’Brien, “Algerine Captives to George Washington, September 22, 1788,” *George Washington Papers*.

²³² Morgan, *The Birth of the Republic*, 113-18. Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 4-7.

²³³ *American State Papers: Finance* 1:123-44.

²³⁴ Ezra Stiles, “The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor,” in *The Pulpit of the American Revolution*, ed. John Wingate Thornton, second ed. (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1876), 463-64; Daniel 12:4 (King James Version).

distinguish our happy country.” George Washington received Adams’ report and agreed that such “auspicious circumstances” excited a particular gratitude to “Almighty God.” Washington hoped to see Americans’ particular blessings extended “to the whole family of mankind.”²³⁵ Surveying the same scene, Haverhill pastor Abiel Abbot preached that “upon this fair picture there is scarcely a shade ... We enjoy the blessings of religion and of government in their purest forms ... Our constitution in one view is a *perfect* instrument ... You see farms, like manors, and houses like palaces. Almost every habitation is comfortable, most are neat, and many are elegant. Markets are crowded with produce ... barns are filled with plenty; lands are cultivated in an improved style of husbandry; all which are proof of the prosperity of the country, the wisdom of administration, and the gracious smile of heaven.”²³⁶

No longer steeling themselves for hardship and suffering, some Americans had less need for the cordial of an apocalyptic promise that Christ’s return drew closer as human affairs grew increasingly dire. Nonetheless, a stumbling block of traditional theology still lay in their path. In spite of the ethic of civic industry that was increasingly ascendant in some circles, the belief that man could be an agent in the consummation of human history clashed with the view of God as the sole universal authority. If God had appointed that wickedness prevail upon the earth until the close of this age with the Second Coming and the ensuing terrors of Armageddon, then man had no power to alter that plan and effect the End Times, or *immanentize the eschaton*. As the New York expositor and onetime congressman Samuel Osgood noted, Christ “will

²³⁵ George Washington, “Proclamation of January 1, 1795” *The Avalon Project, Yale Law School*. <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/gwproc11.asp>.

²³⁶ Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance*, 11-16.

visibly close the present dispensation. We have therefore only to wait patiently for the event; as nothing we can do, will hasten or procrastinate it.”²³⁷

D. A new view of the millennium

Some American clergymen, however, were unable to anticipate the gloomy prospect of Armageddon as they waxed lyrical on what they interpreted as flowering national prosperity. Instead, they reconciled their beliefs regarding human (especially American) progress and the Second Coming by evolving a more suitable eschatological chronology. These exegetes shifted their focus from the terror of the Armageddon to the joy of the millennium—that is, Christ’s glorious earthly reign. As they plumbed clues to the End Times from the “sacred Calendar” or the “Almanac of Prophecy,” American exegetes became animated by the hope that the imminent consummation of human history was the millennium, not the terrible battles of Armageddon. Rearranging the events of the End Times, these exegetes embraced a motivating *postmillennialism*, the belief that Christ’s physical return would *follow* the prosperous millennial period, rather than inaugurate it. It followed that there was no need to fear the cataclysmic battles, earthquakes, plagues, blazing stars, and cosmic woe described in Revelation because these scripturally revealed preconditions had already been fulfilled through past human suffering. Exegetes were no longer beholden to a belief that the world would suffer a sinful devolution until the *deus ex machina* of Christ’s return would halt its decline.

Postmillennial thought thereby transcended lingering cosmic despair over the fall of man and the nature of sin. This eschatological form suggested that God operated

²³⁷ Samuel Osgood, *Remarks on the Book of Daniel, and on the Revelations* (New York, 1794), 198, quoted in Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 136-37.

within the historical world by adhering to the predictable and observable natural laws without the need for terrible intervention or wondrous miracles. As Heimert has summarized, “the millennium was to come neither by a reconstruction of the temple nor through its destruction, but as a renewal of the nature of those who dwell within.”²³⁸ Just as some Americans came to believe that scripture had not promised the millennium would begin with terror or a miracle, many also came to believe it would not begin without their exertion. Thus released from the injunction to “wait patiently” for the Second Coming, the faithful could realize God’s kingdom on earth through pious and constructive actions in the here and now. Although it would be imprudent for us to impose unwarranted uniformity on the whole of American eschatological thought in the 1790s, Edwin Le Roy Froom has summarized the tectonic shifts then occurring. He observed in his canonical *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers* that in the closing decade of the eighteenth century, “heretofore undiscovered forces” redirected “pent-up energies” while history itself seemed “to change its fundamental course” as man armed himself with powerful new “concepts of the world, of power, of society, of freedom, of progress ... and by new convictions about divine destiny.”²³⁹

The élan concomitant with this reworked timeline of human history’s ultimate consummation both validated earthly undertakings and breathed fresh air into a host of new initiatives. Abiel Abbot saw human agency writ large in God’s plan: “the prophecies have been fulfilled and are fulfilling; and thus the *entire* scheme of grace,

²³⁸ Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*, 59-66.

²³⁹ Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, vol. 4, 82. For competing scholarly interpretations of dominant pre- and postmillennial currents, see: C.C. Goen, “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” *Church History* 28, no. 1 (1959): 25-40. James West Davidson and Ruth Bloch in particular reject the optimistic and uniform interpretation of 1790s millennial thought: James West Davidson, “Searching for the Millennium: Problems for the 1790’s and the 1970’s,” *The New England Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1972), 241-61; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 119-44.

with the broad seal of Heaven impressed upon it, is put into our hands.” The missionary magazine *Panopolist* would declare, “There is no one who cannot cast in his mite.”²⁴⁰ This expectancy also transcended patently religious bounds. Millennial eschatology became intertwined with national civic enthusiasm and, according to Butler, “offered a vision of optimistic progress that was made more understandable by Christian teleology.”²⁴¹ Hegemonic religious ideologies enjoyed a reciprocal relationship with those of the political sphere. As the deist Thomas Paine wrote in 1794, whenever a nation’s “system of government should be changed . . . a revolution in the system of religion would follow.” In consonant terms, the minister David Austin explained that the American nation required “Two great Revolutions to usher in the Latter-Day Glory; *outward and political—inward and spiritual.*”²⁴²

The vitality of millennial expectancy was well-suited to the period’s rising “secular optimism.”²⁴³ Impressive strides realized in science, medicine, technology, government, and commerce all supported and in turn derived energy from a view that the millennium was not distant and vague, but rather both *imminent* and *immanent*. Indeed, some visions of the millennium appeared as projections of late eighteenth-century technical progress almost entirely devoid of the numinous. Even the strict Calvinist theologian Samuel Hopkins, a premillennialist who cheered what he perceived as social decline presaging the eschaton, nonetheless held a view of the millennium blinkered by eighteenth-century technology and progress. Hopkins envisioned a

²⁴⁰ Abbot, *Traits of Resemblance*, 12-13; and Oliver Wendell Elsbree, “The Rise of the Missionary Spirit in New England, 1790-1815,” *New England Quarterly* 3 (1928), 309-322, quoted at 320.

²⁴¹ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 215-18.

²⁴² Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason* (Paris: Barrois, 1794), 4; David Austin, *The Millennium*, 393-95.

²⁴³ Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 215-18.

millennium free from war and in which general prosperity would push life expectancy to 100. Nations the world over would speak a universal language and eschew covetous materialism in favor of a New England brand of prudence and temperance, while improved husbandry, high soil productivity, and new farming methods would reduce man's labor to "two or three hours in a day."²⁴⁴

E. Pastor Elijah Parish

One preacher who gave voice to many of these tenets of eighteenth-century American religious thought was Elijah Parish, a conservative preacher in Byfield, Massachusetts, John Foss's onetime home. As a 25-year-old Dartmouth graduate, Parish was appointed pastor of the Byfield Congregational Church in 1787, and he quickly courted controversy. Some parishioners doubted the young and inexperienced Parish, while others resented his refusal to baptize the children of Half-Way Covenant parents—those who were descended from Puritan church members, had faith, and abided by church doctrine, but had not had a personal conversion experience.²⁴⁵ A small faction of the congregation dissented and raised another church in 1796, but Parish survived the schism to become "the most noted and popular preacher in all the region." John Foss was almost certainly familiar with this local preacher whose "thought and style seem to have been suffused with a fire of holy eloquence that kindled the heart of every hearer."²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Samuel Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1797), 55-83.

²⁴⁵ Ewell, *The Story of Byfield*, 161-65; on Half-Way Covenant and the continuity of the errand into the wilderness, see Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 60-67 and Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 60.

²⁴⁶ Parish went to great lengths to catechize area children both in the public schools and at home. Parish and his sometimes-collaborator Jedidiah Morse shared, among other things, an

Parish was noted for his soaring rhetoric in both political and religious matters, and as a staunch Federalist he engaged in fierce politicking.²⁴⁷ His sharp tongue and penchant for exegesis won him praise for his ability to “alarm the sinner”—that is, to instill parishioners with anticipation for the Apocalypse, signs of which he found in abundance in the political affairs of the late eighteenth century.²⁴⁸ Parish often delivered his sermons from notes rather than full drafts, so only a modest collection of his 1790s sermons has survived. Like other sermons of the period, these were published at the request of parishioners who found their words deserving of a wider audience. This may indicate the popularity of the ideas expressed in them, and they point to some of the views in circulation during the formative years of Foss’s life. Despite these textual limitations, a theme—however constrained and partial it may be—does emerge: Parish preached of affliction and suffering, and he called on his listeners to gird themselves for further anguish. He assured his parishioners that “our Israel” was not immured from the myriad dangers threatening the Old World, and he developed this threat into a call to protect the nation from the enemies of God before their evils took root in American soil. In short, he preached a particular style of New England apocalypticism holding that the United States enjoyed a special selection by God despite the existence of continued affliction and suffering.

Like many exegetes, Parish cautioned that “it is never wise to apply figures or prophecies too minutely,” yet he perceived clues to the ultimate “balancing of the universe” in Philadelphia and Paris as well as in the fields of American plowmen. In a

apocalyptic outlook and an apprehension of the Bavarian Illuminati and freemasonry. Ewell, *The Story of Byfield*, 159-67, 73.

²⁴⁷ Parish later withdrew from politics, offering the instructive observation that “Politics is like the variolous contagion, no man catches it a second time.” “Biographical Sketch” in *Sermons, Practical and Doctrinal, by the late Elijah Parish, D.D. with a Biographical Sketch of the Author*, by Elijah Parish (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1826), ix.

²⁴⁸ *Sermons, Practical and Doctrinal, by the late Elijah Parish*, viii.

sermon delivered on the Fourth of July—“the natal day of an Empire”—Parish preached that the pilgrims had persevered through faith and fidelity, and God had rewarded them and their descendants by putting “the flag of triumph in our hands.” Their probity had culminated in “the Federal Constitution, the boast of man and the wonder of the world,” and now Americans enjoyed the plentitude of robust industry, expansive trade, penetrating scientific inquiry, and religious devotion. In this roseate view, Parish entertained little doubt that the New World was witnessing a significant dawn: “The morning cometh—is come. The morn of civil and religious freedom. Here is her permanent home. The heavenly visitant dwells in our houses, in our churches, is our companion in every walk.”²⁴⁹ Yet as revolution in France curdled into antinomianism, Parish also perceived that Columbia’s prosperity was not universal. With the depredations of the “Hag of France” the “last drops” of the sixth vial of divine wrath—as obliquely described in Revelation—were then falling. The agents of “‘the beast’ or civil power of Antichrist” were fanning out across the globe, threatening to ensnare individuals, families, and whole nations. Dangers as diverse as “Atheism, immorality and brutism” had seized Europe, while already “numerous armies” of “illuminized Reviewers and Masons” had planted themselves in the New World.

Parish preached that the United States would avoid these dangers only if men armed themselves spiritually to beat back the enemy. He warned that just as war had been necessary for winning independence, “nothing but the sword can *defend* our Independence.”²⁵⁰ The safeguard of American liberty would be the exertions of pious men, for:

At a distance the tempest roars; we see the lightnings blaze, we hear the thunders roll; it may soon reach your fields, your houses; desolation follows the storm. Should you

²⁴⁹ Parish, *An Oration* ..., 5.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

country call, should martial music rouse your slumbering swords; rise, rise, repel the ungodly foe. Cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood; let him, who hath none, sell his coat and buy one.

YOUR cause is the cause of God. Your enemy is the enemy of God.

BEFORE they threatened you, they had declared war against GOD, against the DIVINE SAVIOUR.

IN the councils of heaven, they are already destroyed, and given to the fowls of the air.

...

Go and conquer; then shall there be a new song in heaven—"Babylon is fallen—is fallen."²⁵¹

Parish's exhortation leaned on biblical typology to assure his listeners that the "Agents" of the "antichristian church" then were a literal threat: "THEY are not *like*, they *are* the spirit of devils.—They work miracles or effect wonders. Their influence is inconceivably great. ... Glance an eye to Europe. These things are visible in real life."²⁵² Following the death of George Washington, Parish steeled his parishioners for the coming "afflictive wonders of divine sovereignty," for just as the Israelites had persevered when, "with Canaan's hill in view, their Leader, their Legislator, their Washington expires," America would endure the coming "dispensations."²⁵³

As with other expositors who relied on biblical typology, Parish viewed affliction as an unavoidable and natural dimension of the progress of human history. This suffering, along with the evangelizing that had transformed America since the early colonial days, gave further hope to Parish and other eighteenth-century exegetes that all the wheels in the universal machine whirred frenetically as they pushed toward Creation's ultimate consummation. In brief remarks he delivered at the ordination of Daniel Merrill in 1794, Parish spoke of the magnificent transformation wrought by the "King of Zion" in the American wilderness: "where late the tawny Pagan celebrated his infernal rites, now the ambassadors of Jesus administer his ordinances, and unfold the

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵³ Parish, *Mourning*, 25.

doctrines of redemption.”²⁵⁴ Parish advocated evangelizing, not just among pagan Indians, but also in the Old World. In an undated sermon, he stressed the need for the faithful to “teach all nations’ . . . Is the desert of Africa, or the wilderness of Arabia, made fertile, or sprinkled with blossoms, by the clouds and showers of Canaan, which never extend to their borders, to cool their burning atmosphere, to cheer their desolation, with the sound of rain?” The apparent progress of Christian missionaries gave Parish hope that “the nations are waking from the slumber of ages. God is doing great things in the land of Ham, and in other countries.”²⁵⁵ Although by the Madison administration the pastor’s hopes of the approaching Second Advent had been blotted out, in Foss’s time the preacher had viewed evangelism, American prosperity, and calamity in Europe as signs of the Apocalypse being fulfilled. In an 1813 sermon Parish reflected wistfully on the early days of his ministry when American statesmen had been “protecting angles” [*sic.*] and new roads and canals connected the nation, trade flourished, morality reigned, missionaries propagated the gospel, and “the light of the millenium [*sic.*] seemed to be dawning.”²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Elijah Parish, *The Right Hand of Fellowship* in Samuel Spring, *A Sermon* (Newburyport: Edmund Blunt, 1794), 49.

²⁵⁵ Elijah Parish, “Sermon XIII,” in *Sermons, Practical and Doctrinal, by the late Elijah Parish*, 266, 278.

²⁵⁶ Parish, *A Discourse, Delivered at Byfield, State of Massachusetts, on the Annual Fast, April 8, 1813* (n.p., n.d.), 11-12.

CHAPTER V

JOHN FOSS AND AMERICAN REDEMPTION

“Oh! what a glorious sight, now we could behold the stripes and stars flying with honor, where they had so often been hoisted with contempt.”²⁵⁷

When Rip Van Winkle fell into his drunken torpor, he was “a poor quiet man . . . and a loyal subject of the king, God bless him!” Waking two decades later, however, he beheld a “bewitched” new world fairly brimming with unimaginable institutions and social conventions. Beside the local tavern an alien American flag flew on a pole topped with a liberty cap declaring the nation’s proud manumission. Rip’s head swirled amid talk of rights and voting, but the phantasmagoria of this new world discombobulated for yet another reason: “The very character of the people seemed changed. There was a busy, bustling, disputatious tone about it, instead of the accustomed phlegm and drowsy tranquillity.” Rip, who had previously spurned “all kinds of profitable labor,” found himself ill-equipped to join the frenetic activity and commotion on the post-Revolution United States.²⁵⁸

The dramatic social and political changes occurring in North America in the waning years of the eighteenth century disoriented the torpid Rip Van Winkle, but they sustained the hopes and ambitions of men like John Foss. Buoyed by the success of the Revolution and developments unfolding in daily life, many Americans held their future with an optimism that was further burnished by evolving religious ideologies. Unlike Washington Irving’s dozing time traveler, however, Americans could not close their

²⁵⁷ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 144.

²⁵⁸ Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle and Other Sketches* (New York: The Useful Knowledge Publishing Company, 1882), 8, 20-21.

eyes to or otherwise elide the tumult and suffering that had given way to ascendancy. For Rip Van Winkle, the casualties of the war were a few boon companions and the “yoke of matrimony,” yet for Americans like John Foss, the ordeals that succeeded the Revolution animated a self-identification with significant religious overtones.

Paradigms of religious and political significance functioned hand-in-glove to allow John Foss to extract meaning from the trials of the early American experience. For Foss, the languishing Barbary captives were biblical Israel, and the Dey a new Pharaoh. These trials, however, were only temporary, for Foss derived hope from a collective national calling that palliated his distress. Foss leveraged notions of the United States as a moral exemplar rising for the instruction of the rest of humanity. Confidence in the ultimate cogency of this American national destiny also shored up Foss’s self-identification as an American, palliating the otherwise disconcerting threats incumbent upon his experience as a captive. Unlike many captives in previous centuries, Foss’s identity was not vulnerable to the caprices of a new religious environment stocked with alien clothing and food, for his principal identity lay not in his manner of dress or his diet, but in his being a free-born American.

In its breadth, Foss’s *Journal* articulates two complementary views of the relationship between Algerian and American power. The relationship in place when Foss arrived in Algiers was one in which the Americans were weak and ineffective. As the experience of American diplomats, politicians, and other captives confirmed, there was apparently very little the nation could do to free the captives and even less to deter future corsairs. After more than a year of unrealized promises of liberation, Foss assessed the uninterrupted string of calamities as an indictment of American honor and ability: “How long, said we, may our country neglect us? How many fatalities befall our

redemption on its passage! How many disappointments may yet occur! How long may our chains and torments be continued!”²⁵⁹ Although Foss was intensely devoted to the United States, even he was forced to lament that his own affliction bore out the shortcomings of his government’s capabilities.

The undertow of national ascendancy that grows throughout the *Journal*, however, assures the reader that although the United States was weak, it was gaining strength. The years that Foss and his “unfortunate fellow captives” spent in Algiers witnessed a fundamental change in the relationship between the United States and Algiers. Foss’s *Journal* takes on an increasingly expectant tone as the diplomats David Humphreys, Joseph Donaldson, and Joel Barlow arrive to negotiate a treaty, when the United States is elevated to a position of glory. The captives of other nations become jealous of the Americans, while the Algerians come to see them “in the most exalted light.” In short, the course of Foss’s captivity witnessed, and in part drove, the passage from national disgrace to the early stages of what Foss and many of others believed to be the nation’s glorious rise.

A. Byfield Parish and the early life of John Foss

Little is known of the early life of John Foss—or Fox, as he was referred to in at least one instance.²⁶⁰ The narrative in Foss’s *Journal* begins as the brig *Polly* pushed off from Newburyport with Foss aboard, and the story ends abruptly when Foss returns home to “the inexpressible happiness of being restored to my friends, and native

²⁵⁹ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 136.

²⁶⁰ A register of redeemed American captives printed in a Philadelphia newspaper identified the sailor as “John Fox,” but this appears to be a printing error rather than an alternate spelling. I have uncovered no further instances in which the sailor was identified in that way. “American Prisoners,” *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), 31 October 1796.

place.”²⁶¹ That Foss is taciturn in describing his life outside Algiers is not surprising. With few notable exceptions, Barbary captivity writers tended to draw a veil over the events of their lives before and after their captivity. Joseph Pitts, for example, closed the 1704 account of his captivity with the concise remark that after reaching London, “I made what hast [*sic.*] I could home to dear *Exeter*, where I safely came, to the great Joy of my Friends and Relations, who had buried me in their Thoughts long before.”²⁶² Rarely do readers learn what happened after the captive’s tearful reunion with loved ones and boon companions. The Cornish captive Thomas Pellow is among the few captives offering even a truncated picture of such disappointment upon their homecoming. In Pellow’s case, a fulsome beard and several decades’ absence since childhood made him a stranger to his parents, while their dramatic aging rendered them unrecognizable to him: “I did not know my own father and mother, nor they me.”²⁶³

Foss’s narrative unsurprisingly offers few deep reflections, and it reveals nothing of the life he led before sailing from Newburyport. We are therefore forced to sketch a portrait of Foss’s upbringing and religious influences from a smattering of details culled from secondary sources and the scant clues that do appear in his writings. The available evidence, however, does indicate that Foss came of age in a time and place where potent idealized notions of American progress maintained currency, and many of these resurface in Foss’s own account of his experiences in Algiers.

Foss, who was born in or around 1772, is said to have lived in the parish of Byfield, a religiously conservative community that lay some five miles inland from Newburyport, then a shipbuilding hub at the mouth of the Merrimack River in northern

²⁶¹ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 160.

²⁶² Joseph Pitts, *A faithful account of the religion and manners of the Mahometans ...* (London: J. Osborn and T. Longman, 1731), 181.

²⁶³ Pellow, *The Adventures of Thomas Pellow*, 328-29.

Massachusetts.²⁶⁴ The area was known both for its commercial ingenuity and its unbending political idealism. In the 1790s the parish boasted a wool mill, as well as manufactories producing nails and carding cotton. Foss came of age in during the Revolution, and like myriad other New England hamlets, Byfield had twittered over the cause, for which it was said the locals’ “patriotic and religious enthusiasm rose to fever heat.”²⁶⁵ A 1774 resolution unanimously adopted by Byfield and the other Newbury environs expressed the putative ideals of the Revolution in a form that would echo in Foss’s account a generation later: “neither we nor our posterity after us, (through any fault of ours), be entangled with the yoke of bondage.”

Like home life, religion is a question mark in Foss’s account. Foss excoriates Catholic burial practices and the fecklessness of Catholic governments, but he falls far short of the clarity contained, for example, in William Okeley’s 1675 account, which declared unambiguously, “This Book is Protestant, and hates a Lye.”²⁶⁶ Although Foss is disappointingly laconic in this regard, a general picture of eighteenth-century New England may lend some clarity to his background. In his 1792 *American Geography*, Charlestown, Massachusetts minister Jedidiah Morse reported that Congregationalist churches accounted for 400 of the state’s 515 congregations, including 54 of the 64 congregations in Essex County, where Byfield lies. Communities were legislatively mandated to “provide, at their own expence, for the public worship of God, and to require the attendance of the subject on the same.”²⁶⁷ Foss was possibly a member of the

²⁶⁴ “American Prisoners” *Gazette of the United States* and Ewell, *The Story of Byfield*, 193, quoted at 172; “History,” Byfield Parish Church, 26 November 2013. <http://byfieldparish.org/?page_id=14>.

²⁶⁵ Ewell, *The Story of Byfield*, 118.

²⁶⁶ William Okeley, *Eben-Ezer: Or, a Small Monument of Great Mercy* (London: Nat Ponder, 1675), foreword.

²⁶⁷ Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography*, second ed. (London: John Stockdale, 1792), 170-75; quoted at 170.

congregation led by the firebrand Elijah Parish, but he was almost certainly familiar with the preachments of the noted pastor, who took up millennial topics with remarkable fervor.²⁶⁸ The extent of Foss's relationship with Parish is impossible to establish with certainty, but what can be said is that Foss's own writing reflects many of the themes and ideas Parish embraced.

B. Weakness

Foss and his nine shipmates may have taken solace in the knowledge that when they sailed from New England in 1793, no American vessels had been captured by North African privateers in some eight years. The period of relative calm may have allayed their fears, but just as captivity was an important paradigm in early American identity generally, there is good reason to believe it remained a particularly familiar institution to sailors. New England youths were said to delight "in hearing sailors relate the curiosities they met with in their voyages," and stories of piracy and captivity were among those in wide circulation. Eighteenth-century sailors have been noted as "voracious readers," filling their idle time with accounts like that of the Vermont sailor John Fillmore, who was captured at sea and forced to work aboard a pirate ship in the West Indies. In particular, the shores of North Africa appear to have held special sway over the imaginations of American seamen, especially those plying their trade in the eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean.²⁶⁹ John Foss records that his "embarrassments" at being captured multiplied when "Rais Hudga Mahomet Salamia," master of the vessel *Babazera* that had captured the *Polly*, told him that he and his shipmates would be taken

²⁶⁸ Foss "is said to have lived on North Street." Ewell, *The Story of Byfield*, 193.

²⁶⁹ *A Narration of the Captivity of John Fillmore and His Escape from the Pirates* (Bennington, VT: Haswell & Russell, 1790); Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 24-25.

to Algiers, for the men knew “the Algerines used the most severity towards christian captives, of any state in all Barbary.” As Foss lamented, Rais Hudga told the men they would “experience the most abject slavery ... which we soon found to be true.”²⁷⁰

Although affliction and sacrifice were important aspects of collective identity for a nation emerging from a bruising war, captivity nonetheless presented a particular challenge to Foss’s idealization of American life. The Algerian privateers’ first appearance in the *Journal* interrupts an idyllic voyage in which Foss and his shipmates carelessly take their breakfast as they near Cape Saint Vincent, “with nothing before us but Liberty and content.” Foss and his companions were ignorant of the fact that “before the Sun should reach his meridian altitude, we should be slaves to merciless Barbarians.”²⁷¹ For Foss, captivity becomes a physical and a spiritual construct. Once in Algiers, the men are locked away at night in their designated *bagnios*. Their freedom of movement is limited. Their rations are meager. They have no institutionalized rights beyond the courtesies extended to them as financial leverage in slow-moving negotiations. For all the harshness of this “deplorable situation,” Foss laments that among the burdens shouldered by Christians in Algiers was the fact that they had “the woeful appellation of slave preying upon their mind.”²⁷² As Foss writes of own lost liberty, “subjection adds to the weight of each curst load, and the pain of the vassal is doubled.”²⁷³

The experience of captivity represents a major departure from one ideal of eighteenth-century American life. By challenging what it meant to be an American, Algiers provided Foss with what Jacob Rama Berman has called an “integral semantic

²⁷⁰ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 11-12.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 19, 8-9.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 120.

space” for the exploration of a nascent American identity. On the most literal and apparent level, the captives were deprived of their physical liberty. Whether they saw this as the equivalent of slavery in the United States, British colonial rule, or an entirely different paradigm, what Foss’s account makes clear is that American identity was ineluctably tied to “Liberty; the greatest blessing human beings ever possessed.”²⁷⁴ In practical terms, captivity meant that the Americans were exposed to the “capricious despotism” of Algerian power structures and its attendant humiliations. Foss observed that Algerians were free to impose onerous excises on anyone unfortunate enough to be placed beneath them in the social hierarchy. Foss wrote to his mother that by controlling the flow of goods to the captives, “Jews, or Moors, or Turks ... have cheated us of near half, and oftentimes more” of their government stipends.²⁷⁵ Although legal power structures had been negotiated in the United States through the Constitution only a few years before Foss’s captivity, Foss makes an instructive observation on the oppression that occurs when this balance is upset. The Dey, Foss said, demands a large tribute from the Beys, who travel their provinces with troops and cavalry searching out subjects who had fled to the mountains to avoid the taxation. Each Bey is then empowered to take “from them whatever he please. Should they make any resistance, or even intimate that they are dissatisfied with his proceedings, he cuts off their heads.”²⁷⁶

Although the institutions of Algiers were unfair to all, Foss believed the American captives were especially disadvantaged by the normalization of extortionate taxation and graft. Americans, for example, were forced to work off their debt to the regency for the clothing it provided in place of the articles stolen during their capture.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 142-43.

²⁷⁵ “Extract of a letter from Mr. John Foss ...,” *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), 5 August, 1795.

²⁷⁶ This passage is likely derived from existing Barbary literature. Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 79.

The men also faced the “unreasonable” demand that they observe the dietary prohibitions of Ramadan, while each captive was forced to give his overseer “2 fowls” and contribute to a collection for sheep for the “great feast.” Foss believed, and not without some justification, that the social disorder permitting these outrages was general throughout Algiers. The 1795 American-Algerian peace treaty cost \$612,500, yet only \$180,000 went toward the “Redemption of 100 captives”—that is, \$1,800 per man. The Dey himself received another \$180,000, while the remainder was spread among the various supporting institutions of the Algerian state. The “inspector of the Dey’s stable,” for instance, took home \$7,000, and the “Clerk of the Dey’s wheat” received \$1,000.²⁷⁷

The captivity paradigm Foss presents in his *Journal* appears designed to strip the Americans of freedom, the protection of democratic institutions, and even their humanity. Foss reports that captives were poked and prodded with a type of spear “not unlike an ox-goad, among our farmers.”²⁷⁸ The men were denigrated as “*Christian Dogs*” and “chain’d like Oxen.” He grouched that “Like sheep, we’re drove.”²⁷⁹ The Americans were crowded into the *bagnio* with “a great number of Animals of prey,” and forced to pay “tribute” for the indignity of a bare room, lest they be left to sleep in the open courtyard “with nothing but the heavens to cover them.”²⁸⁰ Men dying in horrific accidents met with “smiling countenances” as their overseers pronounce that “a christian dog was gone to his own country.”²⁸¹ Those who collapsed from fatigue, injury, or sickness were “generally” beaten until they were able to rise. Sick or injured men who were fortunate enough to be taken to the Spanish-run hospital were driven

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 182-83.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²⁸¹ Oddly, Foss reports a nearly identical phrase as the taskmasters’ adieu to redeemed American captives. Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 42.

from their sickbeds against the protests of the physicians. According to the “records of the nation,” the decaying bodies of “upwards of 98,000 Christians” washed out of their watery graves in the sole Christian burial ground, a one-acre marsh purchased by a “humane” Catholic priest at the beginning of the seventeenth century.²⁸² Foss tells his readers that these things occurred because in Algiers “the untimely death of a Christian, is nothing more thought of, by the inhabitants, than the death of one of their domestic animals.”²⁸³

The dehumanizing treatment Foss describes encountering during his captivity was due to the general caprice of life in Algiers. The men were kept on constant alert through the unpredictability of their masters, who were liable to apply the bastinado “for very small offences or rather no offence at all.”²⁸⁴ Foss plaintively reports that when their masters issued orders, “if we could not understand with words, we must with a stick,” and the men considered themselves “well used” if they were not beaten more than four or five times daily.²⁸⁵ Among the events “which occurred (to my knowledge) dying my Captivity,” Foss records that men had been burnt or impaled for striking a Turk or “speaking disrespectfully of the Mahometan Religion.” He names two overworked Americans who in 1794 received 100 bastinados “for being about five minutes absent from their work, and this at a time when they ought to have been attended by a physician.” Another man received 300 bastinados after “pulling six hairs out of a horse’s tail, which belong to one of the great men of the Regency.” In another instance, a captive received 100 strokes with the bastinado after being found with three

²⁸² Exactly what sort of record Foss is referring to and how he accessed it is unclear, though the sailor “flatters himself” in believing an “authentic account” would please his readers. *Ibid.*, 54-56.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁸⁵ “Extract of a letter from Mr. John Foss . . .,” *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), 5 August, 1795.

board nails. The “Viguihadge” justified the punishment by saying the “unbelieving Christian dog” could have no use for the nails unless he intended to pick a lock or steal. Foss claims such “inhuman scenes of diabolical barbarity ... will never be effaced from my memory.” In one of the most florid passages in the entire *Journal* Foss marvels that he would not have believed humans capable of such “tartareous barbarity” had he not witnessed it himself. So gruesome were the scenes that “we are apt to think we are perusing the records of hell.”²⁸⁶

C. Conversion, clothing, and identity

In the English Barbary captivity literature, the captive is sometimes tempted to ameliorate the exigencies of his condition by converting to Islam, which held the promise of succor, as well as financial and sexual reward. Even in Foss’s time, the diplomat Joel Barlow believed Islam was “so splendid and so inviting” due to “the allurements of pleasure and promise of sensual paradise.”²⁸⁷ The general quality of life, social mobility, and relative cosmopolitanism of North Africa may have heightened the temptation among some early Europeans captives to convert, while some voluntarily joined the corsair fleets with hopes of capitalizing on intelligence and skills gleaned in Europe. For others living for extended periods in North Africa or who were captured during the formative years of their youth, the simple passage of time may have frayed the bonds tying them to home life. The mere exposure to foreign influences such as

²⁸⁶ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 31-40. Here Foss—or more likely an editor—is paraphrasing John Moore’s remarks on the Ottoman seizure of Cyprus in 1570: “We are tempted to think we are perusing the records of hell, whose inhabitants, according to the most authentic accounts, derive a constant pleasure from the tortures of each other, as well as of all foreigners,” Moore, *A View of Society and Manners in Italy: With Anecdotes Relating to Some eminent Characters*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (London: A Strahan and T. Cadell, 1787), 193.

²⁸⁷ Joel Barlow, *Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1787), 82.

food and dress, therefore, threatened to undermine the captive's national and religious fidelity, perhaps opening a back door to apostasy. One French priest who visited Algiers in the seventeenth century observed that long-term captives with relative freedom of movement quickly acquire "a Habit of Libertinism, which makes us look on them as those who are most of all to be lamented; Corruption of Morals being frequently followed by Perversion of Faith."²⁸⁸

The pernicious danger of conversion, however, was not limited to those in North Africa, as the trappings of Islam were liable to displace traditional Christian staples among the careless in Europe as well. The furor surrounding the appearance of the coffee house in seventeenth-century England demonstrates the perceived corrosive influence of Islam as a dangerous surrogate for the national staple of ale. Not only did the popularity of the "Mahometan berry" threaten the English public house, but its appearance was also freighted with nationalistic and religious concerns over its links to the menacing Turks, and the sexualized images associated with Islam suited many discursive purposes. Hysteria over coffee's foreignness resulted in a tract by English housewives who decried the "Enfeebling LIQUOR" for making "Eunuchs" of their husbands. In a full-throated demonstration of the malleability of the cultural forms associated with Islam, a men's riposte celebrated coffee's quickening effects.²⁸⁹

Foss did use the trappings of Islam in flexible discursive ways, but he did not evolve hostile views of the food and dress linked to Islam. Despite their power and ubiquity in many earlier English accounts and particularly on the Jacobean stage, the figurative and literal dangers of donning the turban, for example, are entirely absent in Foss's *Journal*. At least two important factors may explain this shift. First, the pressure

²⁸⁸ de La Motte, *Several Voyages*, 46.

²⁸⁹ Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 110-19.

to convert to Islam had largely dissipated by the time of Foss's captivity as the increasing scarcity of captives increased their value. Indeed, among the only American references to forced conversion in Algiers comes in Richard O'Brien's 1791 report to Congress bemoaning that the American "lads" who were pages to the Dey "were solicited to turn Mahometans, but they would not, which makes their prices somewhat exorbitant."²⁹⁰ Most American Barbary captivity writers do not mention overtures made toward their conversion. Foss's masters made no such attempts, which accords with an edict purportedly made by the Dey and recorded by James Leander Cathcart. Following a disputation between Cathcart and several Turks, the Dey was so affected by Cathcart's hardheadedness that he purportedly advised his court to "let him and his countrymen alone, and make converts elsewhere." The prospect of forced conversion, it seems, was small. Whatever allure Islam may have held for previous generations of willing Christian converts, the Americans failed to perceive it. During treaty negotiations for Foss and the other captives, Dey Hasan Bashaw warned Joseph Donaldson that if the men were granted freedom of movement before departing from Algiers, they may willingly convert to Islam. The warning apparently rang hollow with Donaldson, who is said to have replied that he "did not care if they all turned Moors."²⁹¹ The evidence left by the captives themselves points to little incentive for their doing so.

Because Foss was not solicited to convert he does not praise his own fortitude for adhering to his Christian faith. The absence of such temptation is at once emblematic of the captivity narrative's shift away from edifying Puritan tropes to a more romanticized aesthetic, but it may also reflect a significant ideological development apparent in Foss's time. Foss was a free-born American, and he considered Islam and

²⁹⁰ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 28-30.

²⁹¹ Cathcart, *The Captives*, 148-50, 187.

Algiers as effectively synonymous with slavery and tyranny. To adopt the capricious and arbitrary religion of Algiers was simply incompatible with Foss's principal identity as an American. Foss could be shackled bodily, but he could not disown his liberty by submitting to the spiritual slavery of Islam. These themes echo in the words of Updike Underhill in Royall Tyler's 1797 novel *The Algerine Captive*. After engaging in a disputation with an "artful priest" in Algiers, Underhill declares that he could never convert, for "the religion of my country was all I had left of the many blessings I once enjoyed in common with my fellow citizens."²⁹²

Although Foss himself did not feel the temptation to abandon "the true worship of Jesus Christ," he did observe the infidelity of non-American Christians. He records the conversion "through a mistaken zeal" of a sailor aboard a French merchant ship that put in at Algiers in 1795. After being circumcised, the apostate received 5,000 sequins (some \$9,000, by Foss's reckoning) from the "principal men" of the city, though before long "his conscience smote him, and he repented of his folly." Foss noted that any renegado who later rejected Islam faced "the most ignominious death," rendering Algiers an open-air prison for the now-penitent apostate. Only a few months after the French "wretch" had "exchanged the true religion for Mahometanism," he tried to escape by swimming toward two British frigates, but he was captured and beheaded.²⁹³

Although the cruel exigencies of life in Algiers were antithetical to Foss's idealization of American life, captivity itself failed to inspire him with a fear that his identity as an independent American and a Christian was somehow in jeopardy. Assimilation to Islamic customs, dressing in peculiar clothing, and eating foreign foods did not strike Foss as the menacing prospects they had been to earlier generations of

²⁹² Royall Tyler, *The Algerine Captive*, reprint, (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2005), 151.

²⁹³ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 40-41.

European captives. Far from suggesting that the sailors' identities were imperiled by wearing foreign clothing, Foss's sartorial observations cast clothing as a reflection of the fundamental divide between the noble American character and that of their capricious masters.

The inconstancy of Muslims is apparent when the *Polly* is captured. The vessel's crew had been mollified by the approaching privateer vessel because they had been hailed by a man in "Christian habit." The sailors realized their folly when the dress and beards of the men who then sprang to the deck revealed them to be "Moors, or Algerines." Beyond mere artifice, the Algerians demonstrated their cruelty from the outset, as they stormed the *Polly* "like a parcel of ravenous wolves and striped the cloaths off our backs, all except a shirt and pair of drawers, (myself being left with no shirt at all)." Foss records that on the following day "an old Turk" gave him a tattered, sleeveless shirt. The sailor was soothed "to find a spark of humanity in my barbarous masters, who had but the day before mancipated and stripped us. This was the only Mahometan I ever met with, in whom I had the least reason to suppose the smallest spark of humanity was kindled."²⁹⁴

The suits given to the American captives upon their arrival at port were distinctly foreign, but Foss's descriptions point to Algerian backwardness and effeminacy more than any bright-line indicators of identity. The clothes lacked stitched collars and wrists, and so would not last six weeks, Foss reports. Not only were the garments primitive, with "neither button, or button-hole on the whole suit," but they were distinctly gendered: "the Turk gave each man ... a pair of trowsers, made somewhat like a woman's petticoat, (with this difference,) the bottom being sewed up,

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

and two holes to put the legs thro.”²⁹⁵ The indignity the men suffered grew greater still when the regency obligated the captives to walk seven miles across muddy fields to collect bundles of reeds; “this day’s work, they tell us (by way of derision) is to pay for our suit of cloathes.”²⁹⁶ Meanwhile, clothing also provides a vehicle in which American largesse becomes apparent, for when the American government provided the captives with allowances, its representatives “also furnished us with a sufficient quantity of clothing, decent and comfortable.”²⁹⁷ Indeed, the first instruction issued by American Minister David Humphreys was for the consular staff in Alicante to “hide the nakedness and screen from the inclemency of the weather the poor American prisoners.”²⁹⁸ The government was literally clothing, and we shall see, feeding the men. While the fit and cut of the clothing were somewhat immaterial, what Foss does make clear is that Algerian caprice and American probity were woven into the warp and weft of the cloth.

D. Foul black bread

Christian polemicists had long suggested that Muslims were willfully ignorant practitioners of their faith, and Foss stretches this well-worn trope to new and literal levels in discussing food. Not only did he claim that “many” Muslims broke their own religious codes by “drinking [alcohol] to excess,” but he relishes in describing a notorious Algerian named Mustafa who frequently bought wine from the Christian captives. Foss relates how one evening he witnessed Mustafa quaffing wine and eating pork sausages in a slave tavern. When Foss asked the Muslim if knew what he was

²⁹⁵ “Extract of a letter from Mr. John Foss . . .” and Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 19-20.

²⁹⁶ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 30-31.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁹⁸ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 56-57.

eating, the latter “answered in a great rage ... ‘Hold your tongue you unbeliever, if you do not tell me, I shall not know.’”²⁹⁹

More important to the captives than wine and sausage, however, was the meager allowance of black bread on which they subsisted. Foss was not alone in ginning up pity by calling attention to these rations, purportedly never amounting to more than a shallow dish of vinegar and eleven ounces of sour bread in a day. (Foss claims to have weighed the bread, though his measures differ from those provided by others.) References to starvation diets of “three small loaves of black bread per day & water” and similar rations appear frequently in the letters of Americans such as Samuel Calder and Moses Morse, who wrote home in an appeal for succor.³⁰⁰ John Burnham complained in a letter to his employers, “I have not tasted flesh of any kind for many days, and suffer with hunger whilst I write this.”³⁰¹

When the onetime crew of the *Polly* first arrived in Algiers, the men received no food at all until a French priest became their “kind benefactor” and provided each man a one-pound loaf of white bread. The priest interceded and provided for the men “out of his own pocket” in defiance of the “custom among those sons, of rapine and plunder, not to allow the slaves any kind of food on the first day of the landing, except one small loaf of bread at night.”³⁰² Foss repeatedly criticized Catholicism in his account, yet he did not hesitate to cast a French priest in the role of hero if it allowed him to further highlight Algerian cruelty.

²⁹⁹ Foss records the reply as: “*uz coot sanzafida unta main schelim, ura main arfbi.*” *Ibid.*, 71-72.

³⁰⁰ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 54, 87.

³⁰¹ “... Copy of a letter from captain John Burnham ...,” *American Minerva* (New York), 2 April 1794. One captive wrote in a letter that Muslims refuse to give meat to captives, while another commentator noted that the black bread of Algiers was “not ill-tasted,” although the captives “generally sell it to the poorest *Arabs* and *Moors*, or to others, who buy it for Dogs, &c.,” de La Motte, *Several Voyages to Barbary*, 47.

³⁰² Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 18.

For all his bilious condemnation, Foss does attempt to appear evenhanded. He elsewhere observed that American families enjoying bountiful harvests “may derive some useful lessons from these Barbarians,” who so fear famine that they “regard it as the vilest act of prodigality, to see the least morsel of food wasted.” Foss illustrates his point (and his own desperation) by describing an episode in which a “Turk” stopped him while he was returning from the day’s labors. The man pointed to a crumb on the pavement, and Foss stooped to eat it. Seeing Foss’s straits, the man “gave me a cake weighing nearly half a pound, and told me, if I had not ate the small crumb, he should not have given me the loaf. This was the greatest deed of charity, I ever know from a Mahometan, during my residence in this wretched place.”³⁰³

E. Abjection

Although Foss maintained that his American identity was nigh indomitable, captivity did force him to own to the affliction endured by the American in Algiers. The ineffectiveness of the first American negotiations in Algiers did not encourage him that the process would end quickly. When the diplomat David Humphreys did arrive, the Dey rebuffed him under the pretense of preserving American vessels as fair prizes. Although it is difficult to separate Foss’s true feelings from his sometimes florid prose, the repeated disappointments from failed American diplomacy clearly did affect the sailor. Like many captives and their advocates, Foss elicited sympathy by declaring that among the captives were honorable citizens and veterans of the Revolution. Now those citizens were torn from their wives and families. The patriot who had “adorned society

³⁰³ Foss apparently does not notice that he uses this praise to describe two (presumably) distinct individuals. *Ibid.*, 66-67.

by inflexible honor” could be seen “groaning under the burden imposed on him; and still bearing a heavier weight within,” and thoughts of “love and liberty” forced tears to flow in “briny torrents” down his cheek.³⁰⁴

Compounding the indignation of seeing a veteran of the Revolution straining under “Mahometan vassalage,” was that the American government seemed incapable of freeing them. As we have seen, American captives and their beggared families at home, as well as prominent citizens, petitioners, thespians, newspaper editors, and even some congressmen, believed the United States was not doing enough to secure the release of its captives. Foss writes that he and his comrades sank “under the pressure of affliction” as they came to realize that their “incessant supplications” were “vain and fruitless.” Their despondency was not entirely unwarranted, as the first diplomatic overtures of November 1793 demonstrated. Dey Hasan refused a tête-à-tête with the American minister David Humphreys on grounds that the United States government had treated the regency with “neglect and indifference.” The Dey said he stood to capture more American vessels, and agreeing to a treaty would be nothing but a hindrance. Only weeks after the Dey had rebuffed David Humphreys, corsairs brought into port the brig *Minerva*, the eleventh and final American vessel captured by Algerian privateers in 1793. Along with the vessel came seven more Americans to “bemoan the loss of the blessing of liberty.”³⁰⁵ Foss observed that in stark contrast to the Americans, the crew of an “English privateer Xebec” that had been taken under suspicion of being Genoese was “liberated” by the British after eight months and with no particular diplomatic hand-

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 120-21.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 121-22.

wringing.³⁰⁶ The quick redemption would bear little testament to the protracted suffering Foss and his fellow jack tars.

John Foss embraced the affliction of captivity and the attendant national humiliation by appealing to the ultimate fulfillment of a personal and national destiny. In the “delirium of joy” that overtook the captives when the diplomat Joseph Donaldson finally brokered a truce with the Dey in 1795, the captives imagined themselves “already free men. In idea, our chains were falling off, & our task-masters no longer at liberty to torture us.” Their elation was short-lived, however, for the American government could not find a European banking house willing to advance the specie needed to free the captives. With the men’s liberation foiled by the United States’ bad credit, their elation, “like a dazzling meteor in the dark night,” gave way to “the most gloomy silence.” Despite his abjection, Foss takes solace in a belief that his fate is not outside the remit of God’s power, nor is his misfortune interminable.

Drawing on the language of Christ’s prayer on the Mount of Olives, Foss laments that “the cup of our sufferings was not yet drained.” In that plaintive prayer—one of the most human and affecting moments of the gospel accounts—Christ wavers at the approaching consummation of his earthly mission. It is with trepidation that Christ resigns himself to God’s will and the coming affliction: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” The American captives bore the prospect of their ongoing captivity with understandable hesitancy, and just as Christ beseeched heaven ahead of the Passion, Foss wavers in the face of the exigencies of his affliction: “How long, said we, may our country neglect us? How many fatalities befall our redemption on its passage! How many disappointments may

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 132-33.

yet occur! How long may our chains and torments be continued!”³⁰⁷ This is the moment of greatest doubt and uncertainty in Foss’s *Journal*, and it is the closest he comes to directly criticizing the United States. He laments that “Never was there a longer, more tedious day in the annals of slavery,” yet in Foss’s rendering, suffering—like liberty—is a fundamental aspect of American identity, derived from the dualistic pattern of affliction and redemption fundamental to eighteenth-century American thought.³⁰⁸

F. Barbary captives and the End

Barbary captivity was an affront to the self-identification of Americans like John Foss. Not only did captivity deprive them of their selfishly guarded rights, but it also removed them from the scenes of progress unfolding in the New World. Many interpretations of the drama of American life in the mid-1790s included a belief in the special fate of the American nation itself. Two of the American diplomats involved in freeing the Algerian captives believed the American nation to be a singular entity equipped to alter the course of human history. Their beliefs exerted a heavy influence on the writing of John Foss and may have sustained the captives despite the gloomy realities of their station in North Africa.

In John Foss’s time, millennial thought was beginning to bear significantly upon American national consciousness. More specifically, by arrogating to man a leading role in human history, postmillennial eschatology made a special appeal to the “intellectual

³⁰⁷ Luke 22:42 (King James Version); Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 136. Freighting a strong dualism, the cup serves as the vessel of blessing and bounty in Psalm 23:5 and 116:3; while in Psalm 75:8 and Revelation 14:10 it portends divine wrath. *See also*: John 18:11 in which Christ mollifies his disciples in Gethsemane, saying: “the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

³⁰⁸ Stow Persons, “The Cyclical theory of History in Eighteenth Century America,” *American Quarterly* 6, (1954), 147-63.

sophistication” of Enlightenment thinkers such as the American diplomats in Algiers.³⁰⁹ Goen suggests that postmillennial thinking “was exactly suited to the American nationalistic temper: the new world was to be the scene of dawning glory and no hand could stay its coming. Whatever the tragedy of the ultimate secularization of the millennial hope, it becomes an integral part of the optimistic activism which was destined to crown with success the ‘errand into the wilderness.’”³¹⁰ As Joel Barlow, the poet and diplomat who would earn John Foss’s sycophantic admiration in Algiers, explained in his American epic *Vision of Columbus*, the glorious millennium would be induced “without a miracle.” Rationalists like Barlow and his fellow diplomat David Humphreys could express optimism over the coming millennial period perhaps because ascendant postmillennial forms had denuded eschatology of the necessity that Christ be bodily present on earth.

Stripped of its religious ambit, a *republican eschatology* stabilized a national teleology, and some Americans saw the United States’ success as an end in itself, while others envisioned the nation as a vehicle redeeming the decrepit Old World. Joel Barlow viewed the United States as uniquely fitted by God for the task of extending its enlightened virtues to the rest of mankind as it disavowed the tools of Old World conquest. Sharing a “guided tour” format with the Book of Revelation itself, Barlow’s edited and greatly enlarged epic *The Columbiad* follows Christopher Columbus overseeing Americans’ “new colonial plan / To tame the soil, but spare their kindred man.” Barlow wrote that mankind’s enlightened “great millennial morn” was

³⁰⁹ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 132.

³¹⁰ Goen, “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” 39.

“Predestined here to methodize and mould / New codes of empire to reform the old.”³¹¹ Humphreys’ poetry—far less turgid and meandering than Barlow’s—also placed great emphasis on the nation’s central role in reforming human institutions and improving mankind’s station. Humphreys depicted Americans as “Ye chosen race,” and in his *Poem on the Happiness of America*, Washington takes on a role as the missionary of a new liberal nation-building, assuming “new duties” in guiding the progress of nations in “foreign climes.”³¹² In the 1804 preface to the same poem, Humphreys proclaimed that the “scenes of happiness” prevailing in the United States since the poem’s original publication nearly two decades earlier “excite us to greater exertions, not only for promoting the national prosperity, but even for producing such examples in civil policy, as will tend essentially to the amelioration of the human lot.”³¹³

Men like Barlow and Humphreys held expansive commercialism as a necessary precursor to national prosperity and universal peace. Those goals depended upon the spread of civilization and an international “passion for commerce” inspired by the world’s “imaginary wants.”³¹⁴ The budding American commercialism that Barlow and Humphreys envisioned depended in no small part upon the energy, probity, and exertions of men like the American Barbary captives. Merchants and sailors like Foss were on the front lines of the effort to transform the beggared post-war United States into what one captive called a “great commercial machine.” Their work presaged a benign expansion of American ideology. As one 1806 history of American involvement

³¹¹ Jonathan Kirsch, *A History of the End of the World*, (HarperCollins e-books), Ch. 2.; Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 119-20; Joel Barlow, *The Columbiad* (Philadelphia: Fry and Kammerer, 1807), 150.

³¹² David Humphreys, *A Poem on the Happiness of America* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1786), 5-10.

³¹³ David Humphreys, *The Miscellaneous Works of David Humphreys* (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1804), 24-25.

³¹⁴ Barlow, *Vision of Columbus*, 241-44.

in North African affairs related, the American nation had “pledged herself to transmit to succeeding ages the holy bequest” that it gained through independence, while merchants and traders “confirm[ed], by the industrious and commercial arts of peace, the glory they had acquired in war.”³¹⁵

In Barlow’s *Vision of Columbus*, “that new empire, rising in the west,” charts a new course as Americans use their inborn industry to make the land work for them; they “Bid arts arise, and vengeful factions cease, / And commerce lead to universal peace.”³¹⁶ Through the “nobler toils” of science and industry, Barlow expected prosperity to spread among “all tribes of men.”³¹⁷ Initiatives undertaken to improve education, bolster the government, and promote manufacturing fueled a belief that successive generations in the United States and abroad would reap the benefits of their forebears’ exertions. In this roseate view, religious and secular education would beget a “generation of righteousness” and men of high and low office would “raise the dignity of human nature.” Eli Forbes preached that in realizing this vision, the United States would, like the biblical Tyre, be a mercantile power: “Her merchants shall be princes, and her traffickers or mechanicks shall be the honourable of the earth.”³¹⁸

Opposing these upright efforts of American commerce were the intransigent forces of the benighted Old World. Humphreys observed that the mission of American seamen was vulnerable to Barbary corsairs, “Audacious miscreants, fierce, yet feeble band! / Who impious dare (no provocation given) / Insult the rights of man—the laws of

³¹⁵ *History of the War between the United States and Tripoli, and Other Barbary Powers*, 3.

³¹⁶ Barlow, *Vision of Columbus: A Poem in Nine Books* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1787), 183.

³¹⁷ Barlow, *Vision of Columbus*, 138; and *Joel Barlow to His Fellow Citizens of the United States* (Paris: n.p., 1799), 23.

³¹⁸ The preceding verses of Isaiah 23 recall Tyre’s former colonization, but they also warn of the city’s destruction for ignoring the warnings of God’s messengers. Eli Forbes, *The Importance of the Rising Generation* (Newburyport: Blunt and March, 1795), 4.

Heaven!”³¹⁹ Humphreys’ Barbary pirates animated the competing needs of the prevailing discourse: although pirate depredations besieged the United States and threatened its divinely ordained mission, they remained sufficiently capricious and “feeble,” to facilitate their ultimate defeat. The lines are a sober assessment of American naval vulnerability in the 1786, but they also presage the mounting hopes for the nation to transcend its weakness in accordance a national destiny executed by Americans themselves.

John Foss borrows heavily from Humphreys’ poetry in his *Journal*, and the same strains of teleological American progress are visible there. When Foss first observed captives returning to the *bagnio* after a day’s work, he found their haggard appearance shocking. Foss asked the prisoner keeper “who those people were, and of what crimes they had been guilty, that they were loaded with such heavy chains. I was answered, that they were christian slaves, had been captured in the same manner as myself, seeking an honest livelihood.”³²⁰ Throughout the *Journal* and other eighteenth-century texts we find the oft-repeated mantra that Islam stifled the type of free inquiry, industrious application, and intellectual curiosity that Americans held as the catalyst of their expected prosperity. As one captive in Algiers observed, on top of presents and tribute, “there is no doing any business of importance in this country without first palming the ministry.”³²¹ Honest trade, as Foss observes, was a crime in Algiers, and “no nations are fond of trading with these sons of Plunder, owing to their capricious despotism, and the villainy of their Individuals.” Whereas Americans praised

³¹⁹ Humphreys, *A Poem on the Happiness of America*, 41.

³²⁰ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 19.

³²¹ *American States Papers: Foreign Relations* 1:129.

themselves for their inclusive system of education, “the Turks profess the greatest contempt for Learning.”³²²

Foss’s captivity galled him not only because of its cruelty, but also because it made a mockery of his idealized notion of American industry. The Dey filled his coffers through piracy and ransom, while the “engine” of the entire pirate industry was the forced labor of the captives. Foss records how Turks “generally extort” strangers, while any trader who brought food or drink to the *bagnios* for the captives cheated the men out of half their allowance. Of course, Foss is vulnerable to criticism that his own national economy depended upon a far more ingrained and cruel system of slavery. It appears that Foss’s figurative understanding of what it meant to be an American was far more important than the realities, inequalities, and injustices of home life. So long as Foss maintained that Americans were upright and industrious, it sufficed for him to observe that the people of Algiers were indolent and lazy, spending “a great part of their time in bathing, smoking, and drinking coffee.”³²³ Foss’s critiques of Algiers (although by no means original, and in some cases liberally copied from other sources) sit in fundamental opposition to the dignity expected of lofty American visions of social and commercial life. Far more than clothing or food, it was the American captive’s desire to return home and “again his usual trade pursue” that defined him against the failings of the people of Algiers and sustained his hope in American ascendancy.³²⁴

* * *

³²² Foss, nonetheless, asked for his readers’ indulgence, for he was a poor sailor “whose literary advantages have been but small and whose opportunities of improvement have been limited” Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 75-78.

³²³ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 58.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

G. Finale

About a month after he arrived in Algiers in 1793, the captive American sailor James Taylor wrote bitterly of his government, “there is not a penny allowed to Americans, other nations have a pension.”³²⁵ Samuel Calder wrote to the owners of the schooner over which he had been master that conditions in Algiers were so dire, “& as it will take some time to get any supply from America, & its not possible to Live long in this situation, I am under the Necessity of begging you to suply [*sic.*] me with about. one hundred dollars.”³²⁶ That situation changed in December 1793 when the American government began channeling monthly allowances through Pierre Eric Skjoldbrand, a chargé d’affaires and the brother of the Swedish consul general in Algiers.³²⁷ Although the American government’s spectacular early failures in “the Algerine Business” weighed on many of the American captives, the arrival of these allowances signaled to Foss that the beginning of the end of his abjection had arrived. These allowances, moreover, became an indicator to Foss that his nation was finally rising above all others. Foss notes that although “some of the slaves are allowed a small pittance from their country,” the American government elevated itself by granting monthly allowances of a full eight Spanish dollars to captains, six to the mates, and three to the others:

This generosity of the United S. to us their enslaved countrymen was of inestimable value. It was more precious for being unexpected. No nation of Christendom had ever done the like for their subjects in our situation.

The Republican government of the United States have set an example of humanity to all the governments of the world. Our relief was [a] matter of admiration to merciless Barbarians. They viewed the American character from this time in the most exalted

³²⁵ James Taylor, “Algiers, Nov. 7, 1793,” *Morning Star* (Newburyport), 22 April, 1794.

³²⁶ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 54.

³²⁷ Foss records the donations as coming through “Mr. Skjolderbrand, the Sweedish Consul,” but diplomatic correspondence places the consul’s brother in that role. It is unclear if the captives had other interactions with Matthias Skjoldbrand, the consul, or if Foss is merely mistaken.

light. They exclaimed, that, "Though we were slaves were gentlemen," that "the American people must be the best in the world to be so humane and generous to their countrymen in slavery." The goodness of my country I shall never forget.³²⁸

Compared to their supposedly penurious fellow-captives from European nations, the Americans were objects of the government's unparalleled liberality. Foss's subjection and his disappointment with the scant dignity afforded by his identity as an American recede into the background as he begins to depict the United States in ascent, and although the rise is not without its setbacks and disappointments, the Americans at this point begin to shed their former "despondency" in anticipation of the portentous changes underfoot.

The arrival of these allowances marks a critical shift in the afflictive trajectory of the Americans' struggles in Algiers. From this point on, their experiences point to their eventual redemption, their liberation, and the ultimate success of the national project. Although the allowances arrived in the captives' third month in Algiers, Foss describes the aid on page 120 of his 160-page account. This event is pushed deep into the account by Foss's insertion of generalized descriptions following an introduction to the first weeks of his captivity. Whatever the reason for Foss's ordering his account in this way, the structure's overall effect is to lengthen the perceived suffering endured by the Americans. This narrative arrangement belies the actual circumstances of Foss's captivity, but not as severely as does the fact that he paints over the special position he was granted. James Leander Cathcart, by then the Dey's chief Christian clerk, selected Foss as one of three Americans to work as "servants" in the country home of the American diplomats Joel Barlow and Joseph Donaldson. Foss writes that from 1795 "until the day of our liberation," he was exempted from the "labour and torture of these

³²⁸ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 122-23.

execrable task masters, but still we were slaves. Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still, slavery, thou art a bitter draught.”³²⁹ Foss devotes only a single paragraph to this dramatic improvement of his condition, and he provides no further descriptions of his service. The deceptively light treatment Foss gives his removal makes his redemption appear far more dramatic, and it also cloaks the fact that Foss’s time among the American diplomats, particularly Joel Barlow, exercised great influence on his own understand of captivity and his view of the American nation.

H. Joel Barlow, poet and diplomat

Joel Barlow wrote to his fellow Connecticut Wit and diplomat David Humphreys that he accepted a commission to Algiers for two principal reasons: “to extricate our citizens from slavery” and owing to “a curiosity (perhaps a very idle one) of seeing a people and government who make so singular a figure in the great picture of human activity.”³³⁰ If Barlow’s motivations were not wholly humanitarian and patriotic, his actions did not betray that fact. Foss describes Barlow as a “worthy gentleman, whose compassionate services for his distressed countrymen, can never be estimated too highly, nor praised too much,” and he made the optative cry, “*long live the human [sic.] benevolent Barlow.*”³³¹ For his part, Barlow held the captives in high regard, and he

³²⁹ Cathcart records that he sent “my servants” to Joseph Donaldson, but he does not record their names. For his part, Foss does not admit of any servile relationship to the self-aggrandizing future consul, Cathcart. *The Captives*, 220-21; Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 136-37.

³³⁰ Peter Hill, *Joel Barlow: American Diplomat and Nation Builder* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012), 30.

³³¹ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 139, 144.

joined the jack tars in execrating the corsairs, whom he lumped among the Spanish Inquisition and “Caribbean tribes who eat their slain” as foes of American values.³³²

The effects of Barlow’s time in Algiers are apparent in his revised and expanded 1807 “patriotic poem” *The Columbiad*, a significant retooling of his masterpiece, *Vision of Columbus*. Appearing in the reworked poem as nothing more than “a few chain’d things that seem no longer men,” the captives are bowed by labor and suffering. With “saffron eyes ... And ... black tumors bursting from the groin,” the captives invoked God’s vengeance against their cruel taskmasters.³³³ In Barlow’s epic, as in the actual diplomatic relations with Algiers, the men would invoke God, yet they found succor through their nation, and Barlow was the man who delivered it. It was Barlow who took the unauthorized step of securing a loan from Micaiah Baccri for the captives’ redemption. The cost of the treaty amounted to one-tenth of the federal budget. While reflecting on the vast sum that was spent liberating the “remnant of our captive citizens who have survived the pains and humiliation of slavery in this place,” Barlow wrote to the secretary of state and defended the common man whom he so eloquently championed in his poetry. The letter acknowledges the indignity of the suffering due to captivity, but it also affirms the central role played by the nation in transcending that humiliation to realize a more noble and deserved position. Barlow makes no excuses for his decision, despite his haste and impunity in taking the loan:

... it affords at least some consolation to know that it is not expended on worthless & disorderly persons, as is the case with some other nations who are driven, like us, to this humiliation to the Barbary States. Our people have conducted themselves in general with a degree of patience and decorum which would become a better condition than that of Slaves. And though after they are landed in their country it would be useless to recommend them to any additional favours from the government, yet I hope they will

³³² Curiously, Barlow named the British prison ship as the scene of the most “Unpaid, gratuitous” torture. Barlow, *The Columbiad*, 209-10.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 291-96.

receive from merchants that encouragement in their profession and industry which will enable them in some measure to repair their losses, and from their fellow citizens in general that respect which is due to the sufferings of honest men.³³⁴

While it is improbable that Foss would have seen this letter, which was written after the men departed from Algiers, Barlow's words do grant insight into the interrelated themes of personal dignity and national honor that likewise color Foss's *Journal*.

H. Stars and stripes and 'Algerine Slaves'

Riding the ascendant arc that began with the arrival of government allowances, the denouement of Foss's captivity came in July 1796 when Joel Barlow was able to pay the Algerian treasury with a loan from Micaiah Baccri. In spite of the numerous setbacks they faced along the way, the captives now met with the "smiling countenances" and congratulations of their captors, who told them, "you unbelievers, now you are going to the country of Christian dogs."³³⁵ In Foss's estimation, the act of redemption signaled the final triumph of the American national objectives in Algiers, and he describes his relief as a function of nationalistic fervor. As the captives boarded a vessel chartered for Leghorn, Foss reflected, "Oh! what a glorious sight, now we could behold the stripes and stars flying with honor, where they had so often been hoisted with contempt. ... While we (Americans) were enjoying the fruits of this happy event, there was nothing to be heard, from the slaves of other nations, but the most bitter curses heaped upon their government, and Sovereigns."³³⁶

³³⁴ *NDWBP*, vol. 1, 165.

³³⁵ Foss gives the lingua franca as, "*Sanzafidas droak imche il blaedic, ila kelp ou Romi.*" Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 143.

³³⁶ Foss relished in observing the particular disappointment of captives from Catholic states, who regarded the Protestants as "degenerated christians" and therefore felt neglected by both church and state. *Ibid.*, 144-45.

Foss gives only a cursory account of the events that transpired during his voyage home, quickly glossing over the quarantines, the eight privateer boardings, and his brief imprisonment for injuring a Spaniard in a swordfight. On the life he resumed once he returned, Foss says nothing. In some sense, the discursive importance of Foss's captivity narrative lay not in his actual return home, but in the act of his redemption. The vague promise of personal prosperity in the United States was subsidiary to the governmental redemption and national prosperity that enabled it.

This pattern of suffering, redemption, and anticipated prosperity appears even more clearly in "The Algerine Slaves," a poem that is appended to the second edition of Foss's *Journal*. This poem resembles the *Journal* in miniature, and as such, it provides a capstone to the propitious events of Foss's captivity and redemption. It reviews the entire course of Foss's experiences, including the abjection of captivity and the rising glory and triumph that mark its truncated finale. Like the *Journal*, this poem links the arc of the captivity experience to national ascendancy. Written from the perspective of an unnamed sailor aboard the *Polly*, "The Algerine Slaves" traces the course of the *Journal*'s narrative as it relates how "*Slav'ry*" interrupts the general prosperity that is working propitious changes in the lands of the sailor's "native coast":

... where freedom's gentle reign
Spreads peace and joy o'er ev'ry happy plain.
Where blest religion, sister of the soul,
Lends her kind aid, and happifies the whole.³³⁷

"The Algerine Slaves" shares the *Journal*'s framing by presenting the captives as honest traders who are victims of capricious and illicit piracy. The nature of Barbary

³³⁷ "*Slav'ry*" is always set off by the use of italics, as are other terms ideologically linked to Islam and captivity, such as "*submission*" and "*Ishmael*"—although "Turkish" is curiously not italicized. *Ibid.*, 180.

piracy defied an American understanding of a fair and honest industrial ethic, leading the captive to fulminate against the “sons of Ishmael . . . The scourge of Christians, robbers on the main.” The dejected captive beseeches heaven for intercession and quickens as he imagines the harsh retribution in store for his oppressors:

Columbia’s God! unsheath they glitt’ring sword,
Ride on and conquer—speak, O speak the word;
O let a Captive’s prayer for once invoke
Thy slumb’ring justice to direct the stroke,
On proud Algiers, who seems in scorn to say,
I sit alone, and make the world obey.
...
Tis thine, O God!—thine is the power,
And thine t’ accomplish at the appointed hour!
Then shall thy wrath in vengeful bolts be hurl’d
On proud *Algiers!* the terror of the world;
Thy city prove a heath, a barren plain,
And naught of all thy grandeur shall remain,
But heaps of stones, where owls may brood,
To point the trav’ler where thy glory stood.³³⁸

Delivering relief to the captives are the American diplomats who negotiate despite the Dey’s professed desire to remain at war with the United States in order to allow the capture of more ships and men. Only through the effort of such “worthies” and “patriot-souls” as Barlow and Humphreys is the treaty obtained. The ensuing twenty-one cannon shots fired from the citadel herald a reversal of the power relationship between the United States and Algiers. Although the captives are not yet redeemed and other misfortunes may befall them before their ransom is paid, their ultimate liberation is now ensured through the government’s largesse. The poem acknowledges the captive’s debt to the United States as well as its agents, who never wavered:

³³⁸ The prayer begins with a reference to Psalm 147 in which God answers even the supplications of the “young ravens which cry.” *Ibid.*, 182-83.

Till peace was made. Till Turkish pride
Stoop'd to salute our flag. Ne'er did the ear
Sounds more reviving, more majestic hear,
Than we're [*sic.*] those thunders, three times seven,
Each seem'd as t'were the voice of Heaven.³³⁹

The diplomats are, in the captive's reckoning, the agents of a flowering national project that he longs to participate in. Once freed from his bonds, the captive is able to witness "... his country's glorious rise / Her tow'ring grandeur mount th' ethereal skies."

"The Algerine Slaves" traces the captive's progress from his oppression to his triumphant return home. The entire course of his journey parallels and is interwoven with that of his country. The captive suffered "all the horrors which *Slaves* pertain," yet he prayed Columbia's God would "Ride on and conquer." To the extent that this prayer is realized, its fulfillment comes through the diplomatic intercession of American agents. Algiers is not leveled by divine wrath, but the captives are sprung from their cells by the divinely ordained efforts of the nation to which the captive ultimately returns. Once home and mollified by the "bliss" of national prosperity, the captive does not shirk hard labor, for the encouragement for his "daily toil" is the opportunity afforded by American independence and prosperity, no longer the bastinado or the goad. This American prosperity is unique, for although India boasts of gold and diamonds, Arabia its "spicy adours," and Spain its "peruvian mines," Columbia draws the Old World's émigrés and boasts of unequalled prosperity because it is "Where freedom reigns, & all the virtues smile."³⁴⁰

Although the figurative and ideological relationship of *The Algerine Slaves* to Foss's *Journal* is clear, its authorship is not. Appearing only in the second edition of the *Journal*, this poem borrows themes and lines from David Humphreys' *A Poem on the*

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 184-85.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 188-89.

Happiness of America, sections of which Foss inserted elsewhere throughout both editions of his *Journal*. (The large section of *A Poem on the Happiness of America* Foss placed at the end of the *Journal*'s first edition has been supplanted by "The Algerine Slaves" in the second edition). "The Algerine Slaves" appears in the *Journal* with a separate title page and bears the ambiguous attribution "By a Citizen of Newburyport." More suggestive is that the poem is dedicated to "*the late sufferers in Algiers ... by their Friend*." In spite of this evidence, some scholars, including Baepler, have credited Foss as its author. The strong thematic similarities between the poem and the body of Foss's *Journal* lend credence to this attribution, as does the poem's narrative perspective of a sailor aboard the *Polly*. In his *History of Newburyport*, however, Currier attributed the poem to Robert Treat Paine, Jr., a mostly forgotten poet who lived in Newburyport for a brief period around the time Foss's *Journal* was published.³⁴¹ Other scholars and organizations, including the American Antiquarian Society, have embraced this latter attribution.

Further problematizing the question of the authorship of "The Algerine Slaves" is the 1794 newspaper publication of lines of poetry by "*a Prisoner at Algiers, to his friends in Newburyport*." These lines, which lack the elegance and power of "The Algerine Slaves," deal with the captive's "aching heart" and his grief over his separation from his friends. Among the factors most strongly suggesting that Foss is not the author of these lines is their embrace of a Puritan hermeneutic that is absent in the *Journal*:

O! trust in God who holds the rod,

³⁴¹ While the poem has not generally been attributed to Paine, the editor of a posthumously compiled collection of Paine's work lamented that because many of Paine's poems appeared in long-defunct publications or were otherwise difficult to locate, "it is not improbable that many pieces have escaped." Charles Prentiss, ed., *The Works, in Verse and Prose of the Late Robert Treat Paine, Jun. Esq. with Notes. To Which are Prefixed, Sketches of His Life, Character and Writings* (Boston: J. Belcher, 1812), li-liv.

And doth chastise in love;
He can relieve the captive slave,
And hear him from above.³⁴²

This ought to be contrasted, for example, with Foss's maudlin realization that "vain and fruitless are our incessant supplications."³⁴³ The poetic lines are a paean to the bonds of friendship and family, and they deal but little with the captives' fate or with the nation, all of which suggests Foss is most probably not their author. It is not impossible that one of several other captives from Newburyport tried his hand at poetry while in Algiers, nor is it impossible that Foss produced one of these poems and not the other. Unfortunately, the authorship question must be left inconclusive.

At the very least, "The Algerine Slaves" was published alongside Foss's *Journal* and shares narrative and thematic forms with it, and that consonance may lead to a fuller understanding of the ideologies expressed in the *Journal*. What can be said with certainty is that Foss's *Journal* and "The Algerine Slaves" described and reiterated an American identity that was joined to national prosperity. These works traced the fortunes of the captive and the nation from affliction to triumph, but they do not provide a definitive coda to the changes they anticipate. While Foss may have believed that his redemption signaled that his nation had passed through its straits, he does not definitively cap the telos of the burgeoning national prosperity he and so many others apparently hoped to participate in.

* * *

³⁴² "Lines, *Written by a Prisoner at Algiers, to his friends in Newburyport*," *Impartial Herald* (Newburyport), 7 July, 1794.

³⁴³ Foss, *Journal*, second ed., 122.

I. 'A great partiality for his country'

In 1800, only a few years after returning to Newburyport, John Foss died in Mantanzas, Cuba. Save for his appearances in a few newspaper advertisements, Foss largely dropped out of the public record upon his return to the Newburyport area. He appears to have run a book shop on Water Street, and in 1799 a newspaper advertisement noted him as the master of the schooner *Success*. It is likely he died on this vessel while undertaking a commercial voyage to the West Indies.³⁴⁴ Slave labor had apparently taken its toll on Foss. One obituary proclaimed that following Foss's captivity, "his constitution was too much broken to pursue the laborious profession, in which, otherwise he was well calculated to figure." If captivity broke the man's body, it did little to dampen his enthusiasm for the American cause. The obituary noted, "unsuspecting honesty, native benevolence and generosity, & a great partiality for his country were distinguishing traits of his character."³⁴⁵ A second obituary consisting of three terse lines distilled Foss's life in a way that would likely have pleased Foss. It noted only that he had been a captive in Algiers and that he had been freed "by the paternal interposition of our Government."³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ The star-crossed voyage that resulted in Foss's captivity had originally set sail for Tobago, but changed course when its cargo was taken by another vessel. "For Norfolk and Richmond," *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport), 6 September, 1799.

³⁴⁵ Municipal records indicate *pro forma* that Foss died at sea. "Hymeneal Register," *Newburyport Herald* (Newburyport), 24 October, 1800.

³⁴⁶ "Died," *Massachusetts Mercury* (Boston), 28 October, 1800.

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