U.S. Orientalisms

Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790–1890

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Race(ing) to the Orient

A major component of US American culture in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a race to the Orient; it was a competition among various business and scholastic interests; it was a race with prominent European powers; it was also an inquiry into racial difference and the origins of races. Merchants competed to earn profits from trade to the Near East and Asia, tourists eagerly rushed to visit the Holy Land and marvel at the pyramids, travel writers churned out numerous books on Near Eastern and Asian travel for an omnivorous readership, and the public at large consumed vast quantities of Oriental goods. The cultural proximity between the United States and the Near East and Asia created by these contacts fostered a climate that generated a rich body of literary Orientalist works. Although this orientomania has been noted by many scholars, what has escaped attention is its ideological dimensions: the preponderance of discourses involved in race(ing) the Orient and with which contact with the Orient was intimately connected.¹ For instance, visions of the westerly movement of empire, culminating in the United States, were invoked in arguing for a greater share of trade with Asia; missionaries, alarmed at the lapsed Christianity of Oriental churches in the Near East and at the mixture of races there, wrote their anxieties into popular travel narratives and tracts; finally, the interest of the nineteenth century in racial classification and phrenology was intensified by debates about the racial origins of the Egyptians. This race(ing) of the Orient was an integral component of the cultural imaginary in which literary Orientalist works participated. After briefly examining the commercial and scholarly links between the
United States and the Orient until the mid-nineteenth century, this chapter will focus on a few of the raced discourses on the Orient. I intend these forays into Oriental reading, writing, and trade not as explanatory histories but as rhetorical interventions, questioning the dominant scholarly paradigm of U.S. cultural and political insularity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Oriental Readings

It is important to realize that reading about the Orient was nothing new to nineteenth-century USAmerica. Even the earliest New England colonists, fascinated perhaps by Columbus’s highly mythologized quest to reach the Indies, were widely read in travels to different parts of the Orient. For instance, the elder William Brewster, who came on the Mayflower, carried with him a copy of Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations, a work that covered travel to the Orient and advocated colonization. Among about fifty books that the soldier Miles Standish left at his death were History of the World and Turkish History. By 1723, Harvard could boast of a large list of Orientalia, including Thomas Fuller’s A Piscata-wight of Palestine, Aaron Hill’s A Full and Just Account of the Present State of the Ottoman Empire, and Richard Hakluyt’s History of the West Indies. The intellectual excitement created by works about the Orient is evident in Cotton Mather’s letter to John Winthrop in 1720 in which he particularly mentions, “I have newly received large packets from Tranquebar in the East-Indies.” Mather’s own language was understandably sprinkled with such phrases as “the Arabian proverb” and “a certain proverb in Asia,” a feature Thomas Goddard Wright sees as an example of the knowledge of the Orient that all literate colonials of Mather’s class had. It seems clear that even in this early period the New England intelligentsia considered knowledge about the Orient important.

Academic institutions in New England also stressed the importance of Oriental knowledge. For example, Harvard College, from its very inception, required the study of such languages as Chaldee and Syriac. Such learning did much to awaken interest in the oriental churches in Syria and Lebanon, leading to the first foray of missionary activity in the region in the early nineteenth century. The same period also witnessed both scholarly and popular interest in the Near East as a result of Napoleon’s Egyptian expedition in 1798. Jean-François Champollion’s deciphering of hieroglyphic writings with the help of the Rosetta stone in 1822 created intense excitement in both Europe and USAmerica. By 1831, Champollion’s discoveries and the controversies surrounding them were enough for Edward Everett to write a long essay in the North American Review defending Champollion’s findings over those of Britisher Thomas Young. Such scholarly excitement incited by Egyptology had its popular counterpart as well. The first U.S. display of an ancient Egyptian object (a mumunified ibis) took place as early as 1803 in the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. P. T. Barnum acquired two mummies, which were displayed at Peale’s Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts in New York in 1826. Even Chicago acquired its first mummy in the 1830s. Not to be outdone by British archaeologists and collectors, U.S. adventurers ventured forth into Egypt. In 1832, Colonel Mendes Cohen of Baltimore returned from Egypt with 680 artifacts to establish the first private Egyptian collection in the United States.

By the early nineteenth century, the United States, like Europe, would also feel the effects of what Raymond Schwab has called “the Oriental Renaissance.” According to Schwab, the arrival of Sanskrit texts in Europe in the late eighteenth century created an intellectual renaissance greater in impact than the renaissance following the arrival of Greek manuscripts in the fifteenth century. For scholars in the United States, the work of William Jones intensified interest in India and its languages and spurred inquires into the origins of the Caucasian race. In 1795, just a decade after William Jones’s journal Asiatic Researches had started publication, the Massachusetts Historical Society elected Jones as a corresponding member. U.S. literary interest in India continued with the printing of act 1 of William Jones’s translation of the Sanskrit Shakuntala in the Monthly Anthology and Boston Review in July 1805. A similar flurry of interest accompanied Hindu reformist Ram Mohan Roy’s visit to England in the 1820s. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, wrote glowingly about Roy to Emerson and urged him to read Roy’s writings. Emerson, skeptical at first, recognized Roy as a major thinker in later years. Already in 1817, the Boston publication The Christian Disciple published in its “Religious Intelligence” column an article on Roy titled “A Remarkable Hindoo Reformer”; in March of the following year, another Boston publication, the North American Review, published an essay titled “Theology of the Hindoos, as taught by Ram Mohun Roy.”

An indication of the importance of the Orient in the cultural imaginary is the speed with which literary orientalism was circulated and domesticated in the postrevolutionary period, with even statesman and politicians dabbling in Oriental tales and letters. Benjamin Franklin
wrote a short story titled "An Arabian Tale," which was structured around an argument between Albumazar the magician and Belubel, a spirit. Federalist lawyer Benjamin Silliman used the genre of Oriental letters to attack republicanism. His "Letters of Shahcoon, a Hindu Philosopher, Residing in Philadelphia; to his Friend El Hassan, an Inhabitant of Delhi" began to appear in Noah Webster’s *New York Commercial Advertiser* in October 1801. The letters received such favorable notice that they were collected into a book published by Russell and Cutler in Boston in 1802. A major event in the circulation of Orientalist literature was the publication of *The Arabian Nights* by H. and P. Rice of Philadelphia in 1794; the book sold over forty thousand copies in its first decade. Two decades later, in 1817, Thomas Moore’s *Lalla Rookh* sold more copies than any other book published in the United States that year.13

For readers in the United States, Oriental literatures were not simply exotic, trivial entertainment but literatures that warranted commentary and critique. Although many of these appraisals were predictable, as was, for example, Silliman's conception of Eastern writing as "florid," "brilliant," and full of "wild similitude and extravagant hyperbole," others attempted to undertake a serious study of different Oriental writings. Between June and November 1840, for instance, the *Southern Literary Messenger* published three articles on Arabian literature. The first article broadly enunciated the major types of Arabic languages and the regions in which they were spoken; the second was an analysis of the Book of Job, taken to be the oldest Arabic production; the third was a translation of selected Arabic poems and biographical sketches of the poets.15

New World Westerly Empire and Trade with the Orient

In addition to the availability and popularity of Orientalist works in the postrevolutionary United States, increasing commercial interests both in the Near East and in Asia also brought the Orient closer to the New World, the commercial often signifying more than simply profit, being invested with raced cultural ideologies. As Luther S. Luedtke suggests, New England was engaged in a flurry of international trade. Salem was a major international port, where products from all parts of the Orient were far from foreign. The area was so cosmopolitan that Luedtke contends, "During an age that thought in terms of universal history it would have been surprising to discover an educated citizen of Massachusetts whose cultural horizons stopped short of the Orient."16

Brisk commerce with the Orient quickly followed independence, and the United States soon became an important force.17 Oriental trade was obviously important, both in itself and as a sign of national power. Revolutionary statesmen emphasized the need for the United States to compete with European colonial powers in participating in the opium trade. Jefferson appointed William Stewart as consul at Smyrna in 1802. The main object of trade with Smyrna was opium for China, and the United States cornered the Smyrna market.18 By the 1830s, after a commercial treaty with Turkey was negotiated, trade with the Tripolitan states became well established. It is estimated that in 1832 alone, forty-six U.S. ships landed at Smyrna and fourteen in Constantinepope.19 In the 1830s the U.S. merchant fleet was second in size only to Britain and was highly regarded. In fact, the construction and power of U.S. ships impressed the Turks so much that the sultan hired Henry Eckford, an eminent New York naval architect, to overhaul the shipyard of the Turkish navy on the Golden Horn. In what might be the first instance of U.S. technological dominance, Eckford commanded an operation comprising fifteen U.S. craftsmen and about six hundred Greeks, Turks, and Italians.20

More than trade with the Near East, trade with Asia was vigorously sought after, pursued, and accomplished. It was presumed that the leader in this trade would lead the world; yet, for many, the issue of commercial dominance over Asia was as much racial and cultural as economic and political. Philip Freneau, for instance, celebrated the voyage of the *Empress of China*, the first U.S. ship to sail to the Far East, "Where George forbade to sail before."21 Journeying to the Far East and trading with it were signs of New World independence and incipient power. For many other thinkers, Far Eastern trade exemplified the idea of civilization coming full circle. It was properly held that empires had started in the Far East, had moved to Europe, and were heading to the New World. As early as the 1750s, Englishman Andrew Burnaby commented when he visited the United States, "an idea, strange as it is visionary, [had] entered into the minds of the generality of mankind, that empire is travelling westward; and every one is looking forward . . . to that destined moment when America is to give law to the rest of the world."22 A half century later, in 1807, John Adams concurreingly wrote, "There is nothing, in my little reading, more ancient in my memory than the observation that arts, sciences, and empire had travelled westward;
and in conversation it was always added since I was a child, that their next leap would be over the Atlantic into America." The idea of the newest Western empire exploring and dominating the East therefore had utopian implications beyond those of trade alone. Jefferson had been fascinated with the idea of "the North American road to India" since 1787 and hoped that an overland route to the Columbia River would help divert Oriental trade from Europe to the United States. The Lewis and Clark expedition sent by Jefferson opened such a route in 1804–6.

The idea of the North American road to India was taken up again by Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, one of the most vigorous proponents of Asian trade in the early nineteenth century. Benton prophesied great prospects for Asiatic trade and the consequent burgeoning of St. Louis as one of the greatest cities of the world. He incessantly pushed for a railroad to the Pacific to enhance Asian trade. More interestingly, he cast his arguments about trade in terms of human race and civilization moving west and the return of republican ideals to Asia. Such arguments were complexly transformed into cultural and gendered embodiments in the works of such literary figures as Emerson and Walt Whitman.

Whatever the ideological reasons for Asian trade may have been, merchants began to agitate for Chinese trade in Salem as early as 1783. By 1790, when the elder Elias Hasket Derby’s ship, the Astra, returned to Salem from Canton, it brought a cargo for which duties were paid amounting to an unheard of twenty-seven thousand dollars. The public craze for goods from the Far East ensured that trade was lucrative. However, the biggest moneymaker by the 1830s, as all the major colonial powers realized, was opium. All leading U.S. firms handled the sale of Turkish opium to China, and soon, in direct competition with the British East India Company, they dealt in the more profitable opium from the native states of Western India. Clearly, dominance in trade with the Far East was a signifier of imperial power, and the United States sought for this dominance.

The effects of Asian trade, however, were not simply economic but, as importantly, cultural. The import of Asian goods both created and satisfied the demands of the public. Even as early as the 1850s, Puritan severity notwithstanding, the import of painted Indian calicoes via England was taking place. By the early eighteenth century, silken goods and nankeens were enjoying popularity. Handmade and hand-painted chinaware, porcelain, jade, and chessmen were increasingly becoming signs of class for the well-to-do, a fact that Washington Irving noted in "Salutaguardi." In addition, popular interest in curiosities from the Orient was also rising. The Salem East India Marine Society exhibited its collection of instructive materials from the Orient, including a stone hand from the caves of Elephanta in Bombay, a hookah, and figures of Hindu deities, such as Krishna, Rama, and Sita. By the 1870s and 1880s, "odalisques, cloisonne, sandalwood, and other Oriental bric-a-brac" had become part of the atmosphere of New England; cultural proprietorship over the Orient was as much New England’s as Europe’s.

Travel Writing about the Orient

Although oriental goods and knowledge of Oriental literatures and customs were widely circulated in New England, the race to the Orient was limited to merchants at first and later to merchants and missionaries. Only with the introduction of steam packets in the 1830s did tourists from the United States start to choose Oriental destinations. Once the touristic started, however, Egypt and the Holy Land were the most popular Oriental destinations. U.S. appetite for Oriental travel is evidenced by the fact that by the winter of 1838–39 Egypt had more travelers from the United States than of any other nationality but the British. Tourists were awed at the antiquities and collected many of them, but they never lost sight of their roles as emissaries of a contemporary power. Traveler George English, for instance, floated on a raft in the Nile in 1820 singing "Hail Columbia! happy land!" while John Leydard described the Nile as no bigger than the Connecticut River.

For the people who did not travel to the Orient, there were the accounts of fellow citizens who did. Eager citizens crowded the lecture circuit to hear talks about different Eastern countries. Exotic accounts of a syncretic, monolithic Orient were routinely challenged with more concrete, scholarly talks about specific Orientals, even though the raced prerogatives of the former were often retained. In April 1856, for instance, crowds battled harsh weather in New York to hear an arcane discussion about the two distinct classes of people in Syria. Travel writing about the Orient was also plentiful and popular. The journal of the American Oriental Society, in its first volume, lists forty-nine titles under the heading "American Voyages, Travels, and Other Works Relating to the East and Polynesia." Out of these, thirty-four are travel works about Asia, the Near East, and the Middle East, all published between 1823 and 1843.
Even missionaries, whose sole purpose was to demonstrate the depravities and degradations of the Orient and thus illustrate the need for Christian conversion, attempted to present their works as entertaining travel writings. For instance, Rev. Isaac Taylor, author of *Scenes in Europe*, published in 1826 a pocket-size book called *Scenes in Asia, for the Amusement and Instruction of Little Tarry-at-Home-Travellers*. The title page carries a picture of a composite Orient that bears little relation to and indeed complicates the rhetorical purpose of missionary salvation (see fig. 1). In the picture, a bearded man with long, flowing robes, leaning over what looks like Chinese pottery, rests under a Japanese-looking umbrella and fans himself with a Japanese ladies’ fan. He sits on a Persian rug, an elephant behind him, and a sword visible among his possessions. The book opens with a flippant invitation to the reader to explore the Orient: “A going, a going, we'll set off in style, / The wonders of Asia to see / We’ll take our farewell of Old England awhile, / And give a good jump o’er the sea.” Once he has captured the readers’ attention with this syncretic Orient, however, Taylor proceeds to list the depravities of different Oriental cultures.

Other travel writers focused more on the picturesque and exoticism of the “backward” Eastern races, though some, like Bayard Taylor, questioned theories of racial evolution by critiquing European colonization. Many of these travel writers, such as Nathaniel Parker Willis, enjoyed immense popularity. Willis’s *Pencillings by the Way*, an account of a cruise on the Eastern Mediterranean in 1833, no doubt fascinated readers with its raptures over Mediterranean sunsets, twilights, and veiled women. Similarly, John Lloyd Stephens attained almost overnight success with his two books of Oriental travel, *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* (1837) and *Incidents of Travel in the Russian and Turkish Empires* (1839). Stephens was well received both in the United States and in Europe, his royalties reaching an unheard of twenty-five thousand dollars.

Travel writing continued to enjoy popularity in the mid-nineteenth century, with George William Curtis’s *Nile Notes of a Howadji* (1851) and *The Howadji in Syria* (1852). The first is an account of a journey along the Nile, the second a description of travels across Cairo, the Arabian

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FIG. 1. Title page of Rev. Isaac Taylor’s *Scenes in Asia, for the Amusement and Instruction of Little Tarry-at-Home-Travellers* (1826; reprint, New York: James Conner, 1830).
deserts, Jerusalem, and finally Damascus. Curtis’s books demonstrate the persistence with which constructions of the Orient intersected with raced concerns at home. The Houdjji in Syria begins, for instance, with exotic images of “acacia groves,” “costumes whose picturesqueness is poetry,” and the harem of the pashas. Yet Curtis suggests that Oriental civilization is all in the past: “The Poets at the cafés tell the old tales. The splendors of the Caliphat flash, a boreal brilliance, over an unreal past... Thus oriental life is an echo and a ghost.” Curtis employs binary oppositions that circulate in much of U.S. Orientalist writing, such as past and present, unreal and real, spectral and material. However, it is apparent that even here the imperial rhetoric attempts to displace the anxieties attendant on raced hierarchies in the nation. Curtis writes: “For what more are these orientals than sumptuous savages? As the Indian dwells in primeval forests, whose soil teems with mineral treasure, ... so lives the Oriental.” For Curtis, as for many travel writers, Oriental travel writing was both a foray into another culture and a site where disturbing racial issues at home came to the surface. Even more than the Native American, the African always entered the Oriental landscape questioning the rhetoric of freedom and liberty and drawing attention to the racial discourses that comprised ideas of empire overseas and of colonization within the country.

The most prolific of Oriental travel writers was Bayard Taylor. Taylor recorded his two and a half years of travel in three volumes: A Journey to Central Africa; or Life and Landscapes from Egypt to the Negro Kingdoms of the White Nile (1854); The Lands of the Saracen; or Pictures of Palestine, Asia Minor, Sicily, and Spain (1855); and A Visit to India, China, and Japan in the Year 1853 (1855). In addition to plays, poems, and biographies, Taylor continued to write a number of Oriental travel works, including Japan in Our Day (1872) and Travels in Arabia (1872). He also edited Central Asia: Travels in Cashmere, Little Tibet, and Central Asia (1874) for the multivolume collection of the Illustrated Library of Travel, Exploration, and Adventure. Although Taylor had a flair for the dramatic, and although his appearance on the lyceum circuit clad in Arab clothes and holding a scimitar is reported to have made women swoon, many of his works, imbued with a sense of present-day materiality, made no attempt to recuperate a fetishized Orient of the past. The popularity of his works thus attests to the public receptivity of a variety of Orientalist travel writings, not simply the exotic and dematerialized.

Much of Taylor’s A Visit to India, China, and Japan, for instance, corrects misconceptions about “ignorant” natives created by previous Orientalist writers, recounts the complex diplomatic maneuvers of Commodore Perry, and satirizes the imperial presumptions of his countrymen. Taylor was surely not acceding to stereotypical imperial representation when he wrote of the trip to Loo-Choo, “We landed and marched directly into the interior, without so much as saying, ‘by your leave.’ We had not proceeded more than half a mile, however, before we were overtaken by a native mandarin of the fifth rank, with several subordinate officers, who had been sent in all haste to follow us and watch our movements. Their faces exhibited considerable surprise and alarm, as they beheld eight armed men, with the cool assurance natural to Americans, taking the direct road to Shui, their capital.” As Taylor’s perspicacious narrative indicates, Oriental travel writing often contested the raced imperial ideologies of nineteenth-century U.S. America.

The interest in Oriental literatures, the travel to the Orient, the popularity of books on Oriental travel, the push for trade with different Oriental nations, and the demand for goods and crafts from China, India, and the Near East in the two generations following the revolutionary period are all indicative of a cultural intimacy with the Orient and an eagerness to embrace things Oriental that energized and popularized literary Orientalist works. At the same time, however, this orientomania also intersected with theories of racial and cultural primacy that were widely circulated in the nineteenth century and that were part of the complex genealogy of Oriental representation. Two major racialized discourses on the Orient that were evident in the United States in the early and middle part of the nineteenth century were ethnography/ phrenology and missionary Christianity. An organization closely connected with the latter, although with interests ostensibly more scholarly, was the American Oriental Society, formed in 1842. A brief examination of the polemics of phrenologists, missionaries, and scholars reveals common raced ideologies and points to the extent to which Oriental representations were implicated in highly charged, raced anxieties.

Egyptology, Phrenology, and Polygenesis

That Egyptology was the site of enormous ethnographical and phrenological activity for scholars in the United States, often to support polygenesis and justify slavery, is one of the little-known facts about U.S. culture in the nineteenth century. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed a heated debate between monogenists, who believed in a single
story of creation, and polygenists, who argued for multiple versions of creation. The contentions arose mainly because of the explanation of racial difference through the biblical account of creation. Supporters of monogenesis argued for the unity of human beings delineated in the story of creation in Genesis. Because all people were descendants of Adam and Eve and the three sons of Noah, they argued that all races had the same origin. Polygenists, in contrast, could not accept the idea of the fundamental unity of races and looked to scientific theories to support their beliefs about complete and absolute separation of Caucasian and African races. Of course, the classification of races in the works of Linnaeus, Buffon, and Blumenbach in the late eighteenth century set the stage for later advocates of polygenesis. Although Blumenbach believed in the concept of a single human species, his division of people into five races—Caucasian, Mongolian, American, Ethiopian, and Malay—was hierarchical. Caucasians were presented as the primary race, and all others were degenerations from this type. By the early nineteenth century, particularly in the United States, arguments for polygenesis grew stronger, and even monogenists embraced the idea of different races with different capabilities within a single human species. Constructions of the Oriental civilizations and Oriental peoples could not well be isolated from these theories that permeated the cultural imagination.

Egyptology, in particular, created considerable consternation for both phrenologists and theorists of racial classification, because of the non-Caucasian features of Egyptian monuments like the Sphinx, and because of the existence of people with African negroid features in many of the carvings and parchments of Egyptian antiquity. Dr. Charles Caldwell had already initiated USAmericans into racist phrenology in the early nineteenth century. In the late 1820s he examined skulls dug out of Indian mounds and compared them to the heads of Indians from different tribes. Predictably, he reached the imperial conclusion that only the half-breeds, who had been interbred with the white race, had advanced at all.

Caldwell’s highly polemical, raced construction of phrenology was taken up by ethnographers, Egyptologists, and, later, poets like Walt Whitman. One of the scholars most adept at linking phrenology to ethnography was Samuel George Morton. In 1839 he published *Craniology, or A Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America*. The huge volume contains numerous plates of skulls of various Native Americans, but the most interesting part of

*Craniology* is Morton’s long introductory essay (running over a hundred pages), titled “An Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species.” The major intent of the essay is clearly to prove the superior attributes of Caucasians. Following Blumenbach’s fivefold division of the human species, Morton describes the characteristics of each race, prioritizing the physiognomy, intellect, and power of the Caucasians. The Caucasian race, says Morton, “is characterized by a naturally fair skin, susceptible of every tint. . . . This race is distinguished for the facility with which it attains the highest intellectual endowments.” He characterizes the Native Americans as “averse to cultivation, and slow in acquiring knowledge; restless, revengeful, and fond of war.” He describes the “ negro” as “joyous, flexible, and indolent,” adding that “the many nations which compose this race present a singular diversity of character, of which the far extreme is the lowest grade of humanity.”

Yet, even in this general essay on the types of races, Morton is inordinately interested in racial classification in Egypt. The disproportionate part of the essay devoted to the subject of black races in Egypt reflects the extent to which Egyptology had generated anxieties about the capabilities of different races in the United States. Morton was evidently schooled in Egyptology, for he quotes extensively from John Lloyd Stephens’s *Egypt*, Burghardt’s *Travels in Nubia*, and Wilkinson’s *Ancient Egypt*. In a long note, “On the Supposed Affinity between the Egyptians and Negroes,” Morton questions the opinions of writers like C. F. Volney who had classed the ancient Egyptians with the Negroes. Of one such writer, C. F. Volney, Morton writes that he looked upon the Sphinx, and hastily inferred from its flat features and bushy hair, that the Egyptians were real Negroes; yet these circumstances have no weight when we recur to the fact, that the Buddhists of Asia . . . represent their principal god with Negro features and hair, and often sculptured in black marble; yet among the three hundred millions who worship Buddha, there is not, perhaps, a solitary Negro nation. . . . There is no absolute proof, moreover, that the Sphinx represented an Egyptian deity: it may have been a shrine of the Negro population of Egypt.

Morton’s reaction to such an overdetermined figure as the Sphinx was part of a much larger attempt to undermine the possible challenges that the proliferation of Orientalist knowledge, such as Egyptology, presented to racial hierarchies in the United States. Egyptology had begun
to raise the possibility that Euroamerican racial hierarchies were not, in fact, universal. That anxiety about racial-cultural instability is at the root of Morton’s concerns about the Sphinx is demonstrated by his linking the Sphinx with the figure of Buddha, another revered Oriental figure presented with negroid features.

Morton attempts to use Egyptological knowledge as a means to validate both polygenesis and the long-standing servitude of black Africans throughout history. For evidence, Morton, a meticulous scientist, is ironically forced to rely both on the writings of Egyptologists and on an idea of shared cultural knowledge, because science alone does not suffice. Thus Morton moves from specific analysis of embalmed Theban bodies to a general hortatory argument about the civilizations of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The vast cemeteries of Thebes, Morton argues, “are crowded with genuine Egyptians, whose remains even now retain almost every feature in perfection. Here are the very people who walked the streets of Thebes, they who built Luxor and the Pyramids; and yet among the thousands . . . I am not aware that a solitary Negro has been discovered.” From here, Morton’s argument moves on to a frenzied diatribe about African inferiority, in an attempt to allay anxieties about EuroAmerican cultural origins: “It may justly be inquired, if science, art and literature, had their origin with a Negro tribe on the skirts of Africa, how does it happen that the stream of knowledge has never flowed into, but always from that country? For while it has been permanently diffused through Asia and Europe, in Africa itself it cannot be traced beyond the mountains of Nubia. Again, it is now proved almost beyond controversy, that Egypt, and not Nubia, was the mother of the arts.”

Morton’s phrenological and ethnological inquiries in Crania Americana convinced him of the need to conclusively establish the distinction between the cultivated ruling classes in Egypt and the menial blacks. Morton obtained Egyptian skulls from George R. Gliddon, U.S. consul in Cairo, in 1840 and immediately began work on his second major phrenological study, Crania Egyptica, which he published in 1844. In this study Morton had not only the material but also the scholarly assistance of Gliddon, who, in his years of stay at Cairo, had become an experienced Egyptologist. Gliddon’s career illustrates the convergence of diplomacy, Egyptology, and scientific racism in the nineteenth century. Gliddon was respected for his knowledge and frequently returned to the United States to give lectures on hieroglyphs. In 1841, Gliddon wrote to Morton, in support of the projected Crania Egyptica, “We, as hieroglyphists, know Egypt better now, than all the Greek authors or the Roman . . . I urge your pausing, and considering why the ancient Egyptians may not be of Asiatic, and perhaps of Arabic descent . . . At any rate, they are not, and never were, Africans, still less Negroes.”

This correspondence illustrates the extent to which Egyptology was the site of highly charged questions of racial identity in the United States. Although Gliddon’s immediate concern was to dissociate Africans from culture, much of Egyptological research also centered on proving the Caucasian origins of the ruling powers of ancient Egypt. Morton’s researches in Crania Egyptica, for instance, indisputably linked together in his mind polygenesis and racial and cultural hierarchies prioritizing Caucasians. Morton concluded that

The valley of the Nile, both in Egypt and in Nubia, was originally peopled by a branch of the Caucasian race. . . . Negroes were numerous in Egypt, but their social position in ancient times was the same that it now is, that of servants and slaves. . . . The physical or organic characters which distinguish the several races of men, are as old as the oldest records of our species.

It is no wonder that Secretary of State John Calhoun read in Crania Egyptica evidence of the historical subordination of races and was impressed with Morton’s conclusions.

Gliddon himself, along with Josiah C. Nott, a Southern slavery advocate, published Types of Mankind; or Ethnological Researches Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races and upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History in 1854. The title of the book is itself indicative of the racialization of Egyptological scholarship in the mid-nineteenth century. Types of Mankind contains a “Memoir of Samuel George Morton,” a tribute in which Morton is celebrated as a pioneer phrenologist and ethnographer of the United States. Nott and Gliddon continued to corroborate Morton’s arguments about racial distinctions by scholarly examinations of Egyptian artifacts and writings of different Egyptologists. They argued that the Egyptians had recognized and represented on their monuments many different and distinct races since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C. Much of their evidence rested on the interpretation of the pictorial representation of blacks in ancient Egypt. They noted how ancient Egyp-
tians had routinely differentiated among different races and how non-white races, particularly African nonwhites, were often depicted as enslaved (see fig. 2).

These questions of raced cultural origins, so important to mid-nineteenth-century culture, and so persistently raised by Egyptology and Indology, affected all aspects of U.S. Orientalism. To add to the cultural and ideological confusions, the mixture of races and religions in the Near East continued to create anxious moments of uncertainty in the literature generated by Egyptology. The works of Morton, Gliddon, and Nott foregrounded these anxieties in a particularly compelling manner and also revealed the extent to which Orientalism was implicated in racial issues at home. Leading African American thinkers, however, used the evidence of there being black Egyptians to demonstrate and lay claims to black Africans being the originators of civilization. Frederick Douglass, for instance, found in Egyptology a means of validating black claims to culture. Other writers also joined in. In 1859 a writer for the *Weekly Anglo-African* in New York derided the arguments of racial classifiers, such as Blumenbach, by using the works of Egyptologists on race. Starting with Champollion’s interpretation that the word *Cush* indicated Ethiopia, the writer wryly concluded that because Abyssinia was a mixture of nations and because the Ethiopians had been taken to be the same as Abyssians, the Negroes were a white race. By 1902, Pauline Hopkins had published *Of One Blood*, the story of an African American doctor, Reuel, on an archaeological expedition to Africa; Hopkins attempted to show that “we trace the light of civilization from Ethiopia to Egypt, to Greece, to Rome, and thence diffusing its radiance over the entire world.”

**U.S. Missionary Activity**

While theorists arguing for polygenesis and differences among races embraced Egyptology to buttress their racial theories, proponents of monogenesis turned eastward as missionaries determined to save their degraded brethren, an effort that polygenists like Josiah C. Nott regarded as inherently flawed and thus doomed. In a series of lectures delivered at Louisiana University in 1848, Nott wrote:

All the historical records of the past tell us of the same moral and physical differences of races which exist at the present day, and we can only judge the future by the past. The numberless attempts by the Caucasian race, during several thousand years, to bring the Mongol, Malay, Indian and Negro under the same religion, laws, manners, customs, etc., have failed, and must continue to fail... What has been the result of missions to Africa, to China, to India, to the American Indians, & c.?

**FIG. 2.** Enslaved “Negro” figure from Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon’s *Types of Mankind; or Ethnological Researches Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Cremia of Races and upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1854), 249.

Most clergymen who believed in the theocratic version of New England settlements as kingdoms of God did not, however, share Nott’s cynicism about proselytizing among different races. Missionary activity was seen as related to nation making and empire making, just as the idea of a U.S. empire was always seen in terms of a mission. Only a single generation after independence, the clergy expanded their reach beyond the New World. In June 1810 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was formed at Bradford, Massachusetts. Although spreading “the gospel” was a clearly stated goal of missionaries, political, ideological, and social factors were major components of missionary discourse. Most clergymen saw the development of U.S. missions abroad as important signifiers of national power. Jacob Norton, for instance, used colonial imagery to predict that his countrymen would “go forth into every region of the inhabitable globe, with the everlasting gospel.” As our contemporary scholar Charles L. Chaney put it, “budding nationalism was a factor in the close association between missionaries and the Continental Congress during the Revolu-
tion." After independence, the mutual implication of imperial and missionary discourses was made abundantly clear through the political semiotics of the show-of-force routines by the navy in support of U.S. missionaries in the Near East. In 1835, Eli Smith, a missionary in Syria, requested official action from the United States, adding that Syrians should be taught “that we are a powerful nation,” and claiming that “there is no other way to teach them this but to make them feel it.”

Missionary activity not only signified national power but also raced itself as distinctly Western. The annual reports of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions provide fascinating insight into the politics of missionary activity and the construction of the Orient within U.S. missionary discourse. Missionaries viewed all Eastern societies as culturally and morally deprived and in need of uplift from the West. Because of this view, the Christian Oriental churches of the Near East, for instance, were the objects of almost as much solicitude as the “heathens” of India. Let us examine, for a moment, the arguments of Rev. C. H. Wheeler, a missionary in Eastern Turkey, on the benefits of Christianity.

And shall it be said that godliness, which, in lifting the heathen or nominally Christian nations from the condition of ignorance and degradation, gives them the promise of life . . . . The material advantages which intelligence has over ignorance, industry over idleness, and virtue over vice, are each so many large sums to be placed on the creditor side in striking the balance of advantage which true Christianity has over all false systems.

As Wheeler makes clear, Christian conversion and cultural conversion were perceived as almost identical goals by missionaries. For instance, religious conversion, the ostensible rhetorical concern, is linked with market-driven concerns, such as the advantages of industry over idleness. Even Christian societies in Eastern nations were thus considered objects of conversion, because their morals were considered to be lax.

The 1811 report of the Board of Commissioners reveals the imperial investments of missionary work in the Orient. To solicit more indigenous monies for its activities, the board represents missionary work as a signifier of national might: “Shall the four American missionaries be cast upon the London funds? . . . Would it not indeed be a reproach to our character as a Christian nation . . . should we resign our missionaries to the London Society, under an apprehension that we could not sup-

port them?” In November 1811, the three committee members appointed by the board again made the case for missionaries abroad, by invoking national pride in an “Address to the Christian Public”: “We are more able to take an active part in evangelizing the heathen, then any other people on the globe. With the exception of Great Britain, indeed, no nation but our own has the inclination, or the ability, to make great exertions in the prosecution of this design.” The 1811 report also singles out the East as particularly deplorable and, thus, vital for missionary activity: “The Eastern world, especially Hindoostan, the Malay Archipelago, and the Birman empire, present the most extensive fields for missionary labors; fields which appear to be fast whitening for the harvest. All those vast regions are full of people sitting in darkness and in the region and shadow of death.”

The rapid growth of overseas missionary activity in the early nineteenth century is truly remarkable and belies arguments of historians who view the culture of this period as insular. The formation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1811 was quickly followed by clergy journeying to the Orient. On February 6, 1812, five missionaries bound for Asia were ordained at Salem. By 1818 the board was running eleven schools in India alone, instructing an estimated six hundred students. Elated at their success, the board reported, “In these schools, we seem to see a thousand Hindoo hands at work, from year to year, in undermining the fabric of Hindoo idolatry.” And although the board had solicited contributions for its missions by appeal to national pride and by urging people to compete with Britain, U.S. missionaries, in racial-cultural solidarity with Britain, found the increasing British dominion over India highly salubrious. The board’s 1819 report stated, “By the late war in India, the Mahratta states and territories, on the side of the peninsula or continent adjacent to Bombay, and to a great extent, were subjected to British dominion. This event, as it rendered those countries more easily and safely accessible, gave a new spring to hope and to enterprise.” Other U.S. clergymen likewise saw the inhabitants of India as wretched and deplorable and praised any Western influence in the land. Rev. Isaac Taylor wrote with disgust about the “hundred millions of people in India, given up to so false, debasing, and destructive a religion,” and he welcomed British efforts to “relieve the perishing inhabitants.”

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions similarly saw the Near East as an area for cultural conversion. Many countries had strict laws forbidding attempts at converting Muslims, but
missionaries regarded the Oriental churches as equally fit objects of concern. Because of their close proximity with the Muslims and their shared culture with them, the Christians of the Near East were viewed as only nominally so and were considered even more in need of conversion and purification than their Muslim brethren. Rufus Anderson, the foreign secretary of the board, wrote:

The continued existence of large bodies of nominal Christians among these Mohammedans, is a remarkable fact. They constitute more than a third part of the population of Constantinople, and are found in all the provinces of the empire... Being so numerous and so widely dispersed, should spiritual life be revived among them a flood of light would illumine the Turkish empire.\(^{71}\)

Anderson is clearly fascinated by the cross-cultural experiences of Christians in the Near East, at the same time as he considers himself duty-bound to pronounce these culturally interraced Christians as almost devoid of religious life. Rev. C. H. Wheeler expressed the horror with, and attraction to, the cultural mixtures of the Near East more forcefully: "The population of the country [Armenia] is, if possible, even more diversified than the natural scenery, each outcropping stratum of the blended mass of race, language, and religion—which are sometimes thrown together in inexplicable confusion—pointing back to some political upheaving of a past age, or telling of some barbarian avalanche from the East."\(^{72}\) What seems to fascinate the minister here is the blurring of cultural and racial boundaries, which he then demarcates as outside the bounds of civilization. Racial impurity is associated with "confusion," "upheaving," and impending disaster (an "avalanche"). Much of the U.S. Orientalist literature set in the Near East reflects a similar anxiety about intercultural and interracial contact. Heedful of the need to spread the light in the Near East, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions established missions in Beirut through a system of schools. Starting with a mere class of six Arab children taught by wives of missionaries in 1824, the schools served three hundred students by 1826 and six hundred by 1827.

The American Oriental Society

The establishment of missionary activity in Oriental countries also facilitated the formation of the American Oriental Society in 1842. This was clearly a scholastic society, the purpose of which was to gain knowledge of Oriental languages and cultures. Yet it was indisputably linked to raced missionary activity. Missionaries served as ethnographers and linguists for the society, and their findings were frequently published by the society. The society's first president, John Pickering, in his opening address to the society on April 7, 1843, began by praising the works of missionaries: "As Americans, deeply interested in the reputation of our country, we cannot but take pride in the reflection, that at the numerous stations of the American Missionaries in the East...we have reason to believe there is a greater number of individuals, who are masters of the languages and literature of their pagan and other converts, than are to be found among the missionaries of any one nation of Europe."\(^{73}\) He continued, in his address, to stress the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the American Oriental Society and the missionaries, between knowledge and missionary conversion: "While the propagation of Christianity, on the one hand, is opening to us new sources of information in different languages—which are the essential instruments of all knowledge—on the other hand, the progressive acquisition of those languages is constantly placing in our hands new means of disseminating religious instruction."\(^{74}\)

Missionary outposts in the Near East thus did not exist in isolation either from debates about gender at home or from discourses of empire making at midcentury. Missionary activity was a signifier of national power. In his opening address to the American Oriental Society, Pickering made repeated mention of the exemplary work of American missionaries abroad and compared them with their European counterparts.\(^{75}\) In the same address, he urged his members to master Oriental languages and cultures in order to complete a "general ethnography of the globe."\(^{76}\) Knowledge about various Oriental cultures, the establishment of a significant presence in these places, and missionary activity there were all part of the civilizing mission that the United States, as a newly emergent power, wished to claim for its own.

Yet the ambitious scholarly programs of the American Oriental Society could not help but expand the cultural horizons of the United States. The aim of the society was to study "the history, languages, literature, and general characteristics of the various people, both civilized and barbarous, who are usually classed under the somewhat indefinite name of Oriental nations."\(^{77}\) Diverse scholarly contributions to the journal of the society were made by both missionaries and professional scholars. Essays ranged from discussions of Oriental religions to trea-
tises on Oriental economies and medicine. In May 1844, for instance, at
the annual meeting of the society, Edward E. Salisbury, a professor of
Arabic and Sanskrit at Yale College, gave a talk titled “Memoir on the
History of Buddhism.” In the same year, the society’s journal published
an essay on the history of paper money in China. The variety of interests
in different aspects of Oriental cultures continued to be reflected in the
journal. In 1848, the journal contained a contribution by Rev. C. V. A.
Van Dyck, M.D., a missionary of the American Board of Commissioners
for Foreign Missions in Syria; the essay dealt with the condition of the
medical profession in Syria.

Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century there was not simply a syn-
cretic Orient as the subject of discourse in the culture at large (although
that undeniably was there); there was also knowledge about different
countries situated in what had been designated as the Orient. This
knowledge had structural resemblances deriving from shared narratives
about racial hierarchies and theories about the westerly movement
of empire, creating systemic discourses about the Orient, even though
the specific racism of this knowledge varied. The effect of these dis-
courses on literary Orientalist texts cannot be measured through their
reflection on the literature of the period. Whether the literary texts
resisted, reproduced, anticipated, subverted, parodied, or engaged in
dialogue with these Orientalist discourses, they were clearly in cultural
proximity with these heteroglossic languages (to appropriate Bakhtin’s
terminology for a moment) in which the Orient was not simply part of
an exotic or spiritualized imaginary but, more importantly, part of a
political imaginary.

2

Algerian Slavery and the Liberty Vision:
Royall Tyler, James Ellison,
Susanna Rowson, Washington Irving,
Peter Markoe

The first significant group of U.S. Orientalist works had a distinct,
indigenous genealogy, deriving their immediate impetus from the
diplomatic and military crises between the United States and the so-
called Barbary States. These works were polemically structured around
raced and gendered distinctions between liberty and slavery, morality
and licentiousness—the dualistic rhetoric feeding omnivorously on the
discourse as it had been sketched in the cultural imaginary. A brief
recapitulation of this narrative helps explain the appeal of the “Bar-
bary” wars to the literary imagination. The Muslim nations of North
Africa, as owners of the Mediterranean, had long been receiving pas-
sage money from European ships wishing to conduct trade in the
region. For most European countries, the idea of paying this money
amounted to a ransom demanded by unscrupulous, crafty Muslims,
but they continued to make payment, regarding it as a necessary busi-
ness practice. After the Revolutionary War, however, the United States,
being unable to afford the ransom monies, decided to change the prac-
tice, and the series of events resulting from the new policy captured the
literary imagination.1

The drama began in July 1785, when the Algerians captured the
Marin, a Boston schooner. This capture drew outrage from the public,
but negotiations for the release of USAmerican prisoners taken as slaves
were protracted. More captives were taken in the following years, and it
was only in February 1797 that the Algerians returned them to the United States. Into this bizarre series of events entered Thomas Jefferson. Outraged that the United States should have to pay ransom money for its citizens, Jefferson initiated a series of military and diplomatic maneuvers to defeat the North African nations. The beginning of U.S. victory came with the destruction of a Tripolitan vessel in 1804; in 1805 William Eaton, the U.S. consul at Tripoli, acting like an early Lawrence of Arabia, rescued Hamet Caramanli, the exiled pasha, and rallied the local populace to his cause. With the combined might of indigenous soldiers and U.S. marines, Eaton coordinated an attack against Derna, a city east of Tripoli. The attack ended with the first dramatic show of American prowess, as the marines raised the U.S. flag on the city walls. Although Hamet Caramanli's cause was abandoned because of the possibility of a treaty with the reigning dey, Eaton became an early national hero, embodying both the manly might and the righteousness of the new nation. A peace treaty with the reigning dey was negotiated shortly after Eaton’s attack; however, ransom continued to be paid to the North African states until 1815.

The preceding brief narrative of diplomatic and military events elides the complexly raced imperial impulses and anxieties associated with the altercation. Although the Federalists attacked Jefferson for his botched diplomacy—Thomas Pickering went so far as to call him a “coward and a fool in the conduct of Barbary affairs” —the entire series of events fired the national imagination more than simply in terms of competence or incompetence. What had paradoxically begun as a threat to sovereignty was transformed in the cultural imaginary to a narrative of imperial might. The North African war helped glorify the vision of a powerful, imperial nation. A Senate resolution, for instance, used the iconography of empire to honor Eaton and his marines, who “for the first time spread the American eagle in Africa.” Later diplomats would similarly assess the Tripolitan affair in terms of the country’s international image. Mordecai M. Noah, the late U.S. consul in Tunis and Tripoli, declared in 1826 that the Barbary conflict was more than a means of abolishing the tribute system; it was “of vital importance to a nation having an infant navy, and desirous of establishing a name and a character among the governments of the earth.” As historian Robert J. Allison puts it, “This war proved to Americans their real status as a nation and affirmed that theirs was to be a different kind of nation—different both from the nations of Europe, which were content to pay tribute to the Barbary states, and from the Muslim states, ravaged by their rulers and torn apart by their impoverished and savage people.”

Despots and slaves, taken as signifiers of the “Barbary” Orient, generated an imperial narrative based on raced distinctions between Oriental tyranny and U.S. American freedom, a narrative that drew both on the immediate historical moment and on long-standing Western philosophical distinctions between European and Eastern forms of power. Algeria’s other signifier of difference was its supposedly aberrant sexual practices. The Algerian male, with his harem of obedient women, represented a moral degeneracy and sensual excess that marked him as unhealthy, deviant, and, ultimately, less than male. In contrast, the U.S. American hero could represent health, vigor, and manly restraint. Most texts of the “Barbary” wars foregrounded this narrative in which the robustness of the New World necessitated its takeover of the degenerate Orient, the imperial body being constructed through an exclusion of both slavery and “deviant” sexuality.

Yet the North African Orient (as despotic) evoked the very anxiety it signified. Thus the oppositional rhetoric of liberty and slavery, for instance, is often constructed by a conscious exclusion of the facts of slavery and racial difference in the New World. Similarly, at pivotal moments in these texts, differences between purity, austerity, and excess are revealed as necessary configurations designed to shore up both a patriarchal structure at home and a strong imperial nationhood abroad.

To see the ideological tensions within the discourse on the North African crisis, we can turn to two important architects of U.S. independence: Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. Jefferson saw the problems with the North African states as important enough to warrant including them in his draft of the Declaration of Independence. The pertinent passage, excised from the version approved by the rest of the initiators, reads as follows:

He [King George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative for sup-
pressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce.10

Although the passage is meant to be illustrative of King George's tyranny, most of the invective is directed against the North African perpetrators of slavery. Jefferson dramatizes liberty all the more effectively in the context of piratical slavery, so that the empire for liberty is simultaneously the empire of virtue. The new nation is literally marked as one where bodies are not bought and sold: the nation is the free body. And obviously, the distinctions between the United States and Britain work also as displaced distinctions between Christian and heathen, civil government and despotism, virtue and cruelty.

Yet we cannot help but wonder about the vehemence of tone here and about Jefferson's inclusion of the passage in his original document. Jefferson, whose earliest memory was that of being carried on a silk pillow by a slave, who publicly opposed slavery even as he privately continued to enjoy his plantation, and who participated in legislation that awarded revolutionary soldiers three hundred acres and a slave, tried constantly in his writing to negotiate the tension between liberty and slavery, the fact that the existence of slavery questioned the very definition of the new nation as the empire for liberty.11 In Notes on the State of Virginia, when Jefferson represented "those who labor in the earth" (the majority of USAmericans) as the "chosen people of God," he was simultaneously both excluding the culture of plantations and slavery by presenting the United States as a land of husbandmen and also marginalizing the backbreaking work of slaves, who were, in fact, laboring in the earth for no recompense. Similarly, the virulent attack on King George's acquiescence to the carrying of people "into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither," forcefully recalls U.S. slavery and the hardships of middle passage.

The North African Orient at this stage in USAmerican history thus signified despotism and slavery, which, in turn, both validated imperial definitions of nation and marked the nation as a free body. While Jefferson masked the parallel between North African and U.S. slavery, Franklin emphasized it and used it to advance his abolitionist cause. Parodying the pro-slavery arguments of Mr. James Jackson, representative from Georgia, Franklin presented a speech supposedly delivered by the divan of Algiers in opposition to Erika, a sect petitioning for abolition: "If we cease our cruises against the Christians, how shall we be furnished with the commodities their countries produce, and which are so necessary for us? . . . And is there not more compassion and more favor due to us as Mussulmen than to these Christian dogs?"12 The readers were unlikely to miss the parody.

The reading public likewise had a voracious appetite for all literature related to the North African Orient, and writers capitalized on it. The horror of USAmericans being held slaves and undergoing torture and moral degeneration, as much as Eaton's grand march to Tripoli with the "true" pasha, no doubt fascinated people. At least sixteen plays and three novels dealing with the Tripolitan War appeared on the market.13 Histories similarly fared well. Matthew Carey's A Short Account of Algiers and Its Several Wars (1794) saw two editions within its first year of publication.

In the fiction and drama of the Tripolitan War, the Orient functions as a complex site where the construction of the New World as virtuous, respectable, and a free body is predicated on the exclusion of immorality, excess, and slavery, all of which are signifiers of the North African Orient. Yet, interspersed between these attempts at definition of empire are moments when the distinctions between virtuous empire and despotic empire, virtuous body and licentious body begin to blur. The body of the USAmerican embodying the nation becomes associated with a sensual excess that questions the hierarchical raced distinctions between the New World and the Orient. An examination of the moments of national self definition and demarcation, mediated through the body of the hero/heroine, thus reveals the complex ways in which ideas about the Algerian Orient intersected with assumptions about the fledgling nation as free, mighty, and moral.

This chapter traces the different forms taken by the dualistic rhetoric of liberty/slavery and austerity/licentiousness, beginning with Royall Tyler's construction of the nation in the body of the lone USAmerican male captive in The Algerine Captive (1797); it then moves on to an examination of James Ellison’s The American Captive (1812) and Joseph Stevens Jones's The Usurper (1841), in which the righteous captive embodying the nation becomes the agent of cataclysmic change, in a manner paralleling Eaton's march. Next, it analyzes Susanna Rowson's Slaves in Algiers (1794), examining the complex renegotiation of raced and gendered boundaries that occurs in that work as the discourses of Orientalism and feminism intersect to question traditional USAmerican gender constructions for women. Finally, this chapter examines the challenges to and reinscriptions of the rhetoric of empire through the Oriental narrators, such as Washington Irving's Salmagundi (1808) and Peter Markoe's The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania (1787).
Virtuous Captives: Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive* and David Everett’s *Slaves in Barbary*

In no other text of the Barbary wars is the embodiment of nation as a virtuous body as evident as in Royall Tyler’s *The Algerine Captive*. Tyler’s novel, written partly as a captivity narrative, traces the fortunes of the narrator, Updike Underhill, as he attempts to find a vocation, first as a schoolteacher in a provincial New England village, and finally as a surgeon aboard a slave ship. Captured by the Algerians, Underhill experiences slavery firsthand until he escapes back to his country on a Portuguese frigate. Despite the title, which draws immediate attention to the captivity and the Algerian setting, the structure of the novel makes clear an emphasis on the nature of the new nation and its role in the affairs of the world.

Although the novel is ostensibly divided into New England and Algerian sections—the first dealing with the narrator’s struggles to find a vocation in the country, the second with his captivity in Algiers—the ideological trajectory of the two sections validates a discourse of empire. In part 1, the narrator is a bumbling comic hero searching for himself in a new country, while in part 2, despite being a captive, he is a wise reporter acting as the agent of the new empire. The narrator’s growth thus reads as an allegory of the nation’s dual conception of itself as New World and new empire, a conception pointedly emphasized in the introduction and conclusion of the text. The novel opens with an account of Underhill’s ancestors settling in Massachusetts in the seventeenth century and intermittently having trouble with the strictures of Puritanism; it ends with the narrator paying tribute to the United States as “the freest country in the universe” and to the “excellent government which [he] has learnt to adore in the schools of despotism.” He hopes that the case for a strong country enforcing “a due respect among other nations” has been made.14

Of course, Tyler is well aware of the problems of reifying a teleological national narrative. He begins the novel, therefore, by complicating the narrative of “free” origins. Early in the novel, the narrator lists several instances of political and religious prejudice in early New England. One of his ancestors is exiled for staring inordinately long at a married woman while in church. Tyler in fact picked anecdotes like these from historical sources so as to dramatize the not-so-perfect beginnings of the country.15 But even though the narrative of origins is complicated by the acknowledgment of New England intolerance, Tyler makes clear that his work is fundamentally tied to the ideology of a unique New World virtue defined in clearly gendered terms. Making one of the earliest cases for a national literature, Tyler writes that by reading British literature,

the heart is corrupted. The farmer’s daughter, while she pities the misfortune of some modern heroine, is exposed to the attacks of vice from which her ignorance would have formed the surest shield. If the English novel does not inculcate vice, it at least impresses on the young mind an erroneous idea of the world in which she is to live . . . excites a fondness for false splendor; and renders the homespun habits of her own country disgusting. (28)

In contrast to Britain, which is yoked with vices and luxuries, the New World is associated with simplicity and virtue. It is also clear that this New World identity is conceived of in clearly patriarchal terms. In the preceding quotation, for instance, the author, as father/law, defines native virtue through the disciplining of the bodies of women, which in turn function as emblems of national virtue.

It is significant that such native self-definition takes place in a work purportedly about Oriental despots and brave U.S. slaves, thus making amply clear the convergence of sexualized and raced hierarchies in conceptions of nation and empire. That the hero, Updike Underhill, functions as an emissary of a powerful empire is evident in the anthropological status given to his narrative. Although ostensibly a captive, Underhill’s account is organized under chapters with titles such as “Sketch of the History of Algiers,” “Description of the City of Algiers,” “The Government of the Algerians,” “Revenue,” “Notices of the Habits, Customs &c. of the Algerians,” “Marriages and Funerals,” “The Religion of the Algerians: Life of the Prophet Mahomet,” “The Sects of Omar and Ali,” “The Faith of the Algerians,” and “An Algerine Law Suit.” The structure of the narrative suggests a complete faith in the accuracy of the cultural-ambassadorial observations of the hero. At no point are these sociological observations questioned. In the chapter titled “Marriages and Funerals,” for instance, the narrator writes, “I had rather disappoint the curiosity of my readers by conciseness, than disgust them with untruths. . . . I never was at an Algerine marriage, but obtained some authentic information on the subject” (177). Underhill is presented here not simply as a dilettante observer of Algerine life but as an accurate reporter and, to an extent, a judge. The supposed captivity
narrative works more like a travel narrative, maintaining many of the raced privileges of that genre.16

Yet, while Tyler uses the occasion of Algerian slavery to circulate culturally accepted oppositions between the Algerian Orient and the United States as the newest westerly empire infused with a radical sense of liberty, he also makes clear that the ideology of empire is a constructed one, superimposed on a new nation that is far from being culturally cohesive. The year of the publication of The Algerine Captive was also the year in which the initial debates on the Naturalization, Alien, and Sedition Acts of 1798 had begun.17 Fears about the varied racial composition of the country were beginning to surface. Tyler’s narrator, Updike Underhill, is born into a world haunted by the specter of racial otherness.

My mother, some months before my birth, dreamed that she was delivered of me, that I was lying in the cradle, that the house was beset by Indians who broke into the next room and took me into the fields with them. Alarmed by their hideous yellings and warhoops, she ran to the window and saw a number of tawny young savages playing at football with my head while several sachems and sagamores were looking unconcerned. (43)

The racial schisms of the nation are literally played out on the body of the narrator. The birth of the narrator, signifying metaphorically the birth of the new nation, is interrupted by the dream of conflict with “Indians.” This displacement of the reality of racial conflict onto a dream suggests Tyler’s critique of the suppression of cultural plurality in popular ideologies of nationhood. As a raced nightmare, the dream also reflects the barely controlled anxieties of racial contact, here figured through the white body being torn asunder by native savagery.

The ideology of the virtuous empire was signified by the virtuous body, a connection Tyler makes explicit in his preface. Even a decade before writing The Algerine Captive, Tyler had presented in The Contrast a picture of the New World male—simple, unpolished, honest, and a lover of liberty. This upright hero, tellingly named Manly, continually pontificates on national virtues and cautions against effeminizing foreign luxuries that can sap the vitals of national character. Orientalist writers used the license of exotic surroundings to titillate their readers with descriptions of sexual aberrancies and excesses of the Orient and opposed them to the respectability and normality of the West.

Here, George L. Mosse’s arguments about modern European Protestant nationalism and respectability are particularly helpful. As Mosse suggests, Western nationalism was associated with a curbing of passions and sexuality. The “quiet grandeur of the Laocoon,” symbolizing the overcoming of baser instincts, suggested the ideal of nationhood.18 If Mosse had extended his study to the United States, he might well have found an even stronger alliance between nationalism and respectability. Even before the revolution, the founders of the New England colonies feared lapses in social conduct as much as they feared Native American attacks. In William Bradford’s Of Plymouth Plantation, for instance, Thomas Morton’s Maypole, with its overt celebration of open sexuality, was the ultimate site of the unnational.19

In US American Orientalist writing, where raced ideas of nation and empire were important, distinctions between the respectability of the new nation and the deviances of the Orient were pivotal. Edward Said has shown that in the Western imagination there is a persistence of the association of the Orient with deviant sexuality. The Orient suggests “not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire.”20 Yet, as we examine many U.S. Orientalist works, we see that the dramatic structure of the texts resists clean moral distinctions in the very moments when distinctions between respectability and sexual deviance and excess are being loudly pronounced (the dominant ideology being loudly proclaimed). In such narrative boundary sites, the ideology of the virtuous empire is both deformed and reappropriated.

The instability of the raced and gendered polemic of empire signified through the body of the narrator in The Algerine Captive can be clearly seen in the episode of the Moslem college, where Updike Underhill receives a reprieve from slave labor in exchange for listening to some Islamic proselytizing. The chapter begins by maintaining an insistence on New England respectability. The narrator describes the Moslem college as a sensual excess, with “refreshing baths, cooling fountains, luxuriant gardens, ample larders, rich carpets, downy sofas.” He continues, “I have often observed that, in all countries except New England, those whose profession it is to decry the luxuries and vanities of this world, somehow or other, contrive to possess the greatest portion of them” (136). Here, the lighthearted mockery of New England austerity hides a more ambivalent cultural positioning. The hero’s supposed status as an agent of an empire is already complicated here because he is both the representative of New England denial and, in his stay at the Moslem college, the not-too-unwilling recipient of “luxuries and vanities.”
In what follows, the body of the hero undergoes an ambiguous gendering and sexualization. The narrator describes the process of his bodily cleansing in the Moslem college:

I was carried to a warm bath into which I was immediately plunged. My attendants, as if emulous to cleanse me from all the filth of error, rubbed me so hard with their hands and flesh-brushes I verily thought they would have flayed me... I was then anointed in all parts which had been exposed to the sun with a preparation of a gum called the balm of Mecca... In twenty-four hours, the sun-browned cuticle peeled off and left my face, hands, legs, and neck as fair as a child's of six months old. This balm the Algerine ladies procure at a great expense and use it as a cosmetic to heighten their beauty. (136-37)

Readers immediately note the shift to passive voice ("I was carried to," "I was immediately plunged"), which clearly suggests an authorial desire to maintain a distinction between the narrator's will and the sensual excesses his body is subjected to. All evidence of "manly" labor is stripped as his sunburn is scrubbed off. Yet the very eroticization of the body in this process and the narrator's pleasure with the results of the eroticization suggest a need to transgress notions of respectability mythologized in the narrative of U.S. empire making. There is also a clear fascination with ambiguous gendering, as the narrator graphically describes the literal stripping of his outer (male) skin to reveal the fair (female) skin beneath. The body of the New England male is not quite respectable, not quite male, as he undergoes a feminized ritual of beautification. Yet gender alone is not the issue here. The obsessive concern with skin, particularly the idea of whiteness beneath the layers of color, creates an epistemic fracture in dominant nineteenth-century racial thinking based on racial separation. The male/not-quite-male body is also the white/not-quite-white body.

The concern with the disciplining of the body and its resistance to systems of control occurs repeatedly in The Algerine Captive. The narrator is fascinated with scenes of torture and with the details of public executions. Yet nowhere was the body so obviously regulated and used in the service of a system as it was under slavery in the United States. The oppositional rhetoric of liberty and slavery invoked in Algerian Orientalist texts thus could not help but also signify on slavery back home.23 Tyler's treatment of U.S. slavery reveals the split between colonialists' visions of virtuous empire and the realities of the nation; in its tension between the repudiation of slavery and the reenactment of the master-slave relationship, his text recalls the tortured prose of Thomas Jefferson.

The description of Updike Underhill's passage aboard a slave ship is placed strategically between the narrator's account of his bumbling attempts to find a vocation in the United States and his capture by the Algerians. Tyler includes detailed renditions of the barbarities aboard the slave ship, borrowing many of the details from slave narratives, particularly that of Olaudah Equiano.24 As surgeon of a slave ship, the narrator is forced to face his involuntary complicity in the barbarous institution: "I exacerbat my self for even the involuntary part I bore in this execrable traffic: I thought of my native land, and blushed" (109). Here, the narrator allegorically voices the tortured conscience of the nation and questions the construction of the New World as the land of liberty. Yet the text also resists these absolute oppositions, thus situating itself within a triangulated relationship to the discourses on empire and the Algerian Orient. What occurs in the hero's encounter with slavery is a series of dramatic contradictions.

Updike Underhill is able to simultaneously be an officer aboard a slave ship and a vociferous opponent of slavery. As the voice of conscience, he convinces the ruthless captain to anchor ashore to give the slaves respite from their cramped quarters on the ship. Once ashore and alone with the slaves, however, the bumbling Updike Underhill clearly embodies empire. Under Underhill's supervision the Africans recover, and like grateful and contented slaves, they make him the object of their everlasting gratitude: "Happy was he who could, by picking up a few berries, gathering the wild fruits of the country, or by doing any menial services, manifest his affection for me" (114). Left alone with an African, the narrator's conversion to a New World Crusoe is complete. Underhill sleeps contentedly at night, "the affectionate negro at [his] feet" (116). The narrative moves to unmask the hierarchical racial contradictions underlying the ideology of virtuous empire and to simultaneously support the hierarchies by maintaining a surreptitious master-slave relationship between white and black.

Precisely because The Algerine Captive both resists and mirrors the raced idea of empire based on distinctions between liberty and slavery and between virtue and excess, it is a fascinating cultural document in early Orientalist discourse in the United States. Tyler's representation of the Dey, for instance, is bound up as much with desire and fascination as with the creation of the "Oriental despot." In traditional EuroAmeri-
can symbology, the despot could be representative of nothing short of
cruelty, corrupted passion, and horrific power. Yet in Tyler’s account,
the Dey seems anything but evil. The signifiers of his power—his riches
and accoutrements—are invested with desire rather than loathing, par-
alleling Underhill’s own earlier satisfaction with becoming an object of
worship by the Africans formerly on the slaveship. The sumptuous Ori-
ental despot, a libidinal projection of the benign slaveowner, thus
becomes an intimately needed Other in the cultural imaginary.53

... the Dey was seated upon an eminence covered with richest car-
peting fringed with gold. A circular canopy of Persian silk was
raised over his head from which were suspended curtains of the
richest embroidery, drawn into festoons by silk cords and tassels
enriched with pearls. . . . His feet were shod with buskins, bound
upon his legs with diamond buttons in loops of pearl. Around his
waist was a broad sash, glittering with jewels, to which was sus-
pended a broad scimitar, the hilt of which dazzled the eye with bril-
liants of the first water. (122)

The narrator himself, having been bathed, cleansed, and clothed in
accordance with the rest of the prisoners, looks at the Dey as if in a mir-
or. The glittering jewels and the scimitar, which dazzles the eye with its
brilliance, reflect back the opulent (though overtly repressed) sensual
longings of the narrator. Recognition is here overlaid with misrecog-
nition, as the narrative signifies the mirror image as more complete than
the body of the narrator himself.54 The Dey also is hardly represented as
a figure; he is inclined to “corruptly, with a countenance rather
coldly than commanding, and an eye which betrays sagacity, rather
than inspires awe” (122). The narrator, as viewer, is the victim of the
despot in only literal, dramatic terms but is metaphorically the despot—
the benign ruler/owner—himself.

Tyler’s text effects closure by attempting to normalize gender and
sexuality through the embodiment of respectable nationhood. The hero,
who, as we have seen, was able to speak from a number of gendered
positions while a captive in Algeria, now embodies the traditional het-
erosexual and patriarchal imperative. He vows, when he is back in New
England, to “unite [himself] to some amiable woman” and to “con-
tribute cheerfully to the support of our excellent government” (224).
The idea of nation is negotiated at the end again through the idea of the
virtuous body, as the narrator wishes for the uniting of “our federal
strength to enforce a due respect among other nations” (224; emphasis
mine).

Because Tyler complicates the dichotomies of liberty and slavery
and of morality and licentiousness that are raised in other Algerian Ori-
entalist texts of the period, The Algerine Captive provides an interesting
starting point for investigating narratives of empire as articulated
through the “Barbary” wars. The complexity of Tyler’s questioning of
the raced cultural oppositions of liberty and slavery is evident if we look
briefly, in contrast, at some of the more simply dichotomous and polem-
ic dramatizations of North African slavery. David Everett’s play Slaves in
Barbary (1797), for instance, undermines absolute moral distinctions
between enslavers and enslaved to reinstate, all the more vigorously,
the racial hierarchies perpetuated by New World slavery.

In Slaves in Barbary, the bashaw of Tunis is himself a former slave
who now “buys” the sick and elderly to better provide for them. A
major portion of the play revolves around the fortunes of two Venetian
brothers, Ozro and Amandar, brought as slaves to Tunis but set free by
the compassionate bashaw. This dramatic movement from slavery to
liberty is emphasized at the end of the play in Hamet’s speech: “Gener-
ous brothers [Ozro and Amandar] enjoy your fortune, and let your
father participate in your happiness. . . . Let it be remembered, there
is no luxury so exquisite as the exercise of humanity, and no post so ho-
orable as his, who defends the RIGHTS OF MAN.”55 Everett’s decision to let
the Oriental bashaw be the mouthpiece for the rhetoric of liberty both
erases moral distinctions between the New World and the Orient and
attests to the vigorous reaches of the rhetoric. This erasure, however,
mystifies the raced hierarchies of slavery that the play continues to
maintain.

Among the enslaved in the play are Kidnap, a sadistic Southern
slaveholder, and his slave, Sharp. The play negotiates the raced power
structure of slaveholder and enslaved by ousting Kidnap from his status
but keeping Sharp within his place. Kidnap, whose dreamworld is even
pervaded with longings about torturing his slaves, meets his deserved
fate by being sold to the most inhuman captor in Tunis. But Sharp, the
African American slave, continues to remain in a curiously enslaved
position at the end of the play, being now a slave of the kind bashaw to
whom he is tied in bonds of filial obedience. Humble, supplanting, and
self-effacing, Sharp is the stereotype of the slave advertised by planta-
tion owners in the ante bellum South. Speaking of the bashaw, Sharp
says, “Dat a good planter, masser. . . . He good to white man; an be he
good to poor negor man too??” (110). For Everett, North African slavery becomes a means of containing racial conflict and maintaining the raced hierarchies of ante-bellum USA. 

Umpiring the Orient: James Ellison’s The American Captive (1812) and Joseph Stevens Jones’s The Usurper (1841) 

Whereas for Tyler the nation was embodied through the lone captive become reporter, for James Ellison and Joseph Stevens Jones this captive was a potential Eaton with the power to change North African Oriental history. Eaton’s exploits invited chauvinistic invocations of nation and empire, and in the literary imagination Eaton became a virile, powerful, manly national hero. Eaton’s plan to oust the current pasha of Tripoli and install the more amenable, puppet-like Hamet Caramanli was undertaken on a grand scale. Eaton first found Hamet in Alexandria, signed a peace treaty with him, and forced him to agree to reimburse the United States for all expenditures involved in restoring him to the throne. Then, with an army of four hundred, including Arabs, Eaton marched to Derna, a journey no Westerner had attempted since the Muslim conquest.26 The abandonment of Eaton’s cause by the U.S. administration only caused his stature as cultural hero to rise, particularly in the literary imagination. Federalist poet Robert Treat Paine eulogized Eaton’s courage and daring thus: “Eaton all danger braves, / Fierce while the battle raves, / Columbia’s standard waves / On Derne’s proud wall.”27 The plays inspired by Eaton similarly capitalize on his moment of conquest. All end with the restoration of the rightful leader to the Tripolitan throne by heroic U.S. soldiers (as Eaton had planned) and represent the restoration as a fulfillment of the Columbian vision. 

The dedication to Jonathan Smith’s The Siege Of Algiers (1823) makes the imperialistic appeal of Eaton’s march perfectly clear and demonstrates the cultural significance attached to the status of the nation abroad. His drama, Smith writes, will demonstrate how “the United States of America, a minor maritime power, have, by their late coercive measures, evidently proven how this unjust and arbitrary system of tribute demanded by the Barbary powers might be counteracted” and have “set a glorious example in the face of the Christian world.”28 James Ellison similarly sees The American Captive as a work “calculated to awaken the feelings of the American reader” and to bring to recollection “the magnanimous conduct of our brave countrymen, Commodore Pribble and General Eaton.”29 Joseph Stevens Jones’s The Usurper ends with U.S. sailors scaling the palace walls and hoisting the U.S. flag over Tripoli and with a band playing “Hail Columbia.”30

While The Siege of Algiers is clearly an allegorical drama, Ellison’s The American Captive and Jones’s The Usurper are more complex dramatizations of U.S. American will, operating through raced distinctions between the New World and the Algerian Orient.31 Jones’s play, with an identical cast of characters, is in fact a revision of Ellison’s, twenty-nine years later, and attests to the continuing fascination of Eaton’s march in the cultural imagination. A brief comparison of the two versions provides interesting insights into how discourses on the North African Orient and on empire changed within a generation.

Many of Ellison’s characters reify a dichotomous Orientalist polemic. The captive in Ellison’s play embodies New World manly austerity and democratic freedom, which is set against Oriental despotism and decadence. The bashaw is clad in “sumptuous Turkish habit,” with a “large diamond crescent.” He has a “rich canopy of silk over his head, from which are suspended curtains of the richest embroidery.” In contrast, Anderson, the U.S. captive (and ultimately the Eaton-like liberator), scoffs at richness of parentage and proudly proclaims his New World, meritocratic heritage: “If to be the son of him who served his country, in the time of peril, be that which you call noble, I am of must noble extraction; but if, from pamper’d lords and vicious princes, alone descend this gift, then I am not.” (20).

Yet slavery at home questions the absolute moral distinctions between the New World and the North African Orient. Jack, a U.S. sailor in The American Captive, resists under Algerian captivity, proudly vaunts the virtues of his native land to the Oriental overseer El Has. The interchange that follows parodies the facile disavowals of racism made by many Northerners.

Jack. . . . Aye, I’ll carry you to the Theatre, cast anchor in the centre of the pit. . . . you’d think yourself in paradise! . . . And the country too, it’s a charming place, Mr. Overseer; no slavery there! all free-born sons!

El Has. No slavery, hey? go where Senegal winds its course, and ask the wretched mothers for their husbands and sons! what will be their answer? Doom’d to slavery, and in thy boasted country too!

Jack. Oho! avast there! I’m a Yankee—no slaves with us; why a
black gentleman, in our part of the country, is the very paragon of
fashion. (37)

The very casual fashion in which the discussion of slavery is bandied
around and dismissed by a minor happy-go-lucky character is a searing
indictment of the arguments routinely used to dismiss complete eman-
cipation. 35

Ellison's forceful interjections of racial conflicts complexly tritru-
late the dichotomous rhetoric of respectability and decadence and ques-
tion the overt narrative of empire projected in the odes to Columbia
Ellison's play twenty-nine years later, the ideology of the New World as
a new empire had acquired more circulation. Although the term Mani-
ifest Destiny would not be introduced until 1845 (four years after the pub-
ication of Jones's play), the clamor to control nonwhite races had
become stronger by the 1830s. 36 For example, Sarah Haight's accoun-
t of her European and Oriental travels, Letters from the Old World (1840),
puts the absolute racial divisions propounded by ethnographers.
Describing a slave market in Cairo, Haight does not overtly exonerate
the practice, but she spares no words in describing the ugliness of the
African slaves: "I have never yet seen such a hideous misrepresentation
of the human form divine, as these children of Ham presented. The var-
ious degrees of form and feature, from the passably comely to the hor-
ribly ugly and disgusting, almost induced me to believe the theory
which holds that there is a connected chain of animals." 36 Jones simi-
larly allowed the racial instabilities in his revision of Ellison's play. The
most revealing ideological revisions are the complete lack of references
to slavery at home; slavery is contained within the Orient.

Instead Jones adds staple images of the eroticized Orient that asso-
ciate the Orient with sensuality, languor, and ease, a narrative within
image of Oriental plenty. In a "splendid garden" in Tripoli, Oriental
slaves gather flowers and sing contentedly, "Slaves we are but merry,
meery be" (130). Jones's revisions are strongly implicated in the racist
discourses of the period and the changed circumstances of the North
African Orient. The mid-nineteenth-century happy slave, for instance,
is a stock antebellum figure. Also, by the time Jones wrote his revi-
sion, European colonization of North Africa had begun with the French
conquest of Algiers in 1830. Both Jones's increased use of stock images
to present the Algerian Orient as a decadent area requiring control and

Feminism, the Orient, and Empire:
Susanna Rowson's Slaves in Algiers (1794)

While most male Orientalist writers articulated the racial rhetoric of
equality through the righteousness and masculinity of a hero embodying
the nation, Susanna Rowson recast the rhetoric in terms of the
liberty/slavery of women. Rowson's Slaves in Algiers is particularly fas-
cinating in its attempt to negotiate an emancipatory feminist discourse
through the possibilities of the Algerian Orient while simultaneously
striving to keep the discourse hierarchically raced. Unlike in the works
of Tyler and Ellison, the Colonialist vision of the nation as a new empire
spreading its message is interrupted in Rowson's text not so much
through racial images of slavery but through questions about the lim-
ited freedom of women in the New World. 37

The plot of Slaves in Algiers is a series of captures and escapes,
revolving around two USAmerican women, Rebecca and Olivia, who
embodify the virtues of the nation. Rebecca, an older mother figure, is
sold for ransom money by Ben Hassain, a crafty Jew. Olivia, horrifically,
had been captured by the Algerian dey, to be part of his harem. The
drama unfolds with Olivia instructing Algerian women about their
denying roles in the harem and with the plotting of a revolt that
finally results in the freedom of all slaves. A familiar racial conflict
erupts with the infatuation of the racially mixed Femah for Frederic, a
USAmerican, but the threat of miscegenation is contained through a plow
swirl, when Femah resolves to remain in Algiers to care for her
aging father.

The preceding sketch of plot twists does not capture the complex
cultural discourses of nation, empire, gender, and womanliness that cir-
culate in Rowson's text. Like most writers who made literary use of the
Algerian alteration, Rowson made sure that popular notions about
national ideology were present in her work. 38 Thus, Slaves in Algiers
bears the subtitle A Struggle for Freedom. The United States is celebrated
there as a moral meritocracy, "the land where virtue in either sex is the
only mark of superiority." 39 The nation, embodied as "Columbia,
where one can claim liberty as a birthright," is the region of "Peace
and Liberty" (10, 41). As one of the captives planning a revolt reasures
his anxious mother, “An’t I an American, and I am sure you have often
told me, in a right cause, the American did not fear anything” (50). The
play ends with a fervent prayer to the future reaches of empire: “May
Freedom spread her benign influence thro’ every nation, till the bright
Eagle, united with the dove and olive-branch, waves high, the acknowl-
edged standard of the world” (72).

Yet the rhetoric of empire is not the only privileged one. As Rowson
makes clear in the epilogue, which is designed to be spoken by the
author herself, a major aspect of her drama is a reconceptualization of
the roles of women.

Well, Ladies tell me—how d’ye like my play?
“The creature has some sense,” methinks you say;
“She says that we should have supreme dominion,
“And in good truth, we’re all of her opinion.
“Women were born for universal sway,

“Men to adore, be silent, and obey.”

True, Ladies—bounteous nature made us fair
To strew sweet roses round the bed of care
... To raise the fall’n—to pity and forgive,
This is our noblest, best prerogative.
By these, pursuing nature’s gentle plan,
We hold in silken chains—the lordly tyrant man. (73)

In this flippant ditty, Rowson manages at once to support the culturally
acceptable image of women as ministering angels and to associate
women with “sense” or reason, which was traditionally viewed as a
male possession. Through her lighthearted tone, Rowson also manages
to critique the USAmerican patriarchal culture, in which women are re-
egolated to silence and obedience. The British political satirist William
Cobbett was in fact so incensed with the feminist intent of the play that
he published a vicious attack on Rowson in 1795.

The feminist concerns of Slaves in Algiers should not surprise us.
Rowson, author of the best-selling book Charlotte Temple, had long been
concerned about the roles of middle-class women. In her own life Row-
son had broken away from the traditional position of a middle-class
woman. She had earned her own living as a governess after her father’s
deporation to England. After her marriage to William Rowson, a Lon-
don hardware merchant who went bankrupt, she again supported her-
self and her family, this time by joining a Philadelphia theater com-
pany.³² After 1797, for the last twenty-five years of her life, she devoted
herself to the cause of female education and headed her own Young
Ladies’ Academy, where she motivated women, in part, by requiring
them to read her own Sketches of Female Biography, a series of vignettes
about famous women in history.³³ Many of her novels, however, were
Richardsonian sentimental tales of seduction, betrayal, lost virtue (a
euphemism for virginity), and suicide. Yet, as Cathy N. Davidson
suggests, the sentimental novel as it was adapted by a few writers in the
United States transcended some of the limitations of the genre. David-
son notes that although the sentimental novel appealed to moral critics
because of the connection between “virtuous maidenhood and holy
matrimony,” some works “could be dedicated (literally) to the preser-
vation of female virtue’ yet still exhibit a definite tension between the
public morality apologetically espoused in the preface and the actions
portrayed in the plot.”³⁴

Many of Rowson’s works exhibit a similar tension. Although the
plot of Charlotte Temple, for instance, might be said to punish vice—
Charlotte, the fallen woman, dies of grief after having given birth to an
illegitimate child—the preface is directed toward the need of women to
acquire a good education to better fend for themselves. Similarly,
although many of Rowson’s novels turned sentiment on itself and
demonstrated that marriages could be unhappy, Rowson used the
didactic plot of the sentimental novel to be accepted by the critics of the
day.⁴¹ Until late in life, she continued to aver that she had never “pro-
mulgated a sentence that could militate against the best interests of
religion, virtue, and morality.”⁴²

The tensions and ambivalences in Rowson’s work reflect the con-
flicting discourses on conceptions of womanhood in the late eighteenth
and early nineteenth centuries. In a sense, the revolutionary period
placed a high premium on the influence of women on national charac-
ter. Women were regarded as the guardians of culture, and many
thinkers saw crucial links between manners and polity. James Tilton,
the president of the Delaware Society of Cincinnati, observed, for in-
stance, that while men had more powers in executing laws, “the
women in every free country [had] an absolute control of manners: and
it is confessed, that in a republic, manners are of equal importance with
the laws.”⁴³ But while women were permitted some social equality,
political equality for women was disparaged. The printing of Mary
Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in the United States in 1792 was an instantaneous success, leading to a second U.S. edition in 1794, but the work also provoked a series of attacks. Benjamin Silliman, for instance, excoriated Wollstonecraft's rejection of the inherent "sensibility, timidity and tenderness of women," maintaining that "she wished to strip them of every thing feminine, and to assimilate them, as fast as possible, to the masculine character."44

Given the simultaneous introduction of the "women's question" and the pious moralizing against the rights of women, restraints on the representation of women in literature were inevitable. However, in *Slaves in Algiers* Rowson found that she could dispense with many of these restraints because of the Oriental setting and the major roles played by women of mixed racial/cultural origins. The result was a surprisingly bold representation of the moral, ideological, social, and sexual being of women.

An interesting subversion of the tainted-virtue fallen-woman type in *Slaves in Algiers* is the representation of Fetnah, the most racially and culturally ambiguous woman in the play. Fetnah is British and Jewish by birth but Algerian and Moslem by rearing (her father having moved to Algiers and converted to Islam) and Christian by conviction. She is a white, Christian woman—though with a difference—with whom European and USAmerican women readers could identify. In dramatic terms, Fetnah is a tragic victim, a fallen woman, because due to her father's unscrupulous selling of her, she is one of the dey's mistresses.

The fallen woman could never be considered respectable in the United States, because she had violated a fundamental ethical standard of eighteenth-century morality that equated chastity with goodness. Mary Wollstonecraft had eloquently commented on this morality: "With respect to reputation, the attention is confined to a single virtue—chastity. If the honor of a woman, as it is absurdly called, be safe, she may neglect every social duty."45 Rowson, however, refuses to treat Fetnah as a fallen woman; indeed, her "honor" is hardly made issue of here. Fetnah discusses her sexual relationship with the dey with a candor and flippancy unthinkable for a female character in a sentimental novel. When asked by another woman from the dey's harem whether she might indeed love the dey, she responds,

No—he is old and ugly, then he wears such tremendous whiskers; and when he makes love, he looks so grave and stately, that I declare, if it was not for fear of his huge semyetar, I shou'd burst out a laughing in his face. (6)

Dorothy Weil sees Fetnah as "Mrs. Rowson's version of a Shakespearean comic heroine, the girl who shows her spirited, active side."46 I suggest that by rewriting the current discourses of sexuality in which women's bodies are measured according to a pure/impure dichotomy, Fetnah scripts for herself a gendered space far beyond that of the Shakespearean heroine. Fetnah talks freely about her sexual experiences with the dey because she is represented as having an agency; her body and sexuality are accessible to her own signification, rather than being determined by the strictures of patriarchal ideology.47 Yet Fetnah is not presented as the immoral whore, the obverse of the pious woman. Indeed, she is given all the desires and longings deemed acceptable for the woman in the sentimental novel. Fetnah, like the heroine of the sentimental novel, longs for some man to "fall in love with [her], break open the garden gates, and carry [her] off" (31), and she is indeed rewarded with such a person.

Rowson's subversion of the conventions of the sentimental novel, even if parodic, are to a large extent made possible because she uses the Oriental setting to break free of conventions at home. Women's sexuality, for example, was a taboo subject in the United States, in large part because of a clerical shift that contributed to the desexualized representation of women there. Ministers in the seventeenth century had focused on Eve and the sinful, transgressive nature of women. But by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ministers were regarding women as guardians "against the encroachments of impudence and licentiousness."48 Women's sexuality (when acknowledged) had only been regarded as sinful, and it was the middle of the nineteenth century before moral reform groups advocated instructing women in physiology so that they could understand their own sexual natures.49

Rowson's use of the Algerian Orient as an enabling sexual space for women is especially interesting given the prevalent Western association of harems with enclosure. Harems were associated with a sexuality that was for the pleasure of the male alone.50 In Jonathan Smith's *The Siege of Algiers*, for instance, the two Georgian and Circassian "virgins" brought to the harem choose the respectable way out of their sexual bondage by choosing the ultimate means of separation from the body—suicide. As Circassiana says in her dying speech, "... thus did we to the last preserve our youthful pledges, and that virgin innocence which is the pride and ornament of our sex."51 Smith uses the harem to reinforce the morality of the sentimental novel.

In contrast, Rowson represents the harem as a social space where women can form bonds free of the society of men. In the harem, Selima
and Fetnah discuss the institution of sexual monarchy, and Zoriana and Olivia form bonds so strong that they are willing to make sacrifices for each other. Indeed, their uncommonly close friendship is repeatedly stressed in the play. The love of both Zoriana and Olivia for the same man, whom they are both willing to give up for each other, is really a displaced love of the women for each other. The eroticized bonding of the women deforms the gender constructions of the sentimental tradition and of the imperial body, which is contoured on the exclusion of “deviance.” More importantly, by linking the embodiment of New World virtue with an Oriental counterpart, Rowson undermines the raced divisions inherent in the rhetoric of empire, much as the unmasking of Tyler’s hero in The Algerian Captive, Updike Underhill, upsets the idea of the heteronormative, manly hero embodying the nation as an empire.

In making the harem a space for female interaction, Rowson was no doubt drawing on the perceived association of harems with imprisonment to question the limited freedom available to women in the land of liberty. Having Algerian women envy the total freedom of women in the United States draws attention to the very real limits on that freedom. Fetnah, for instance, says wistfully, “Oh! it must be a dear delightful country, where women do just what they please” (32). She idolizes “Columbia” as the “land where virtue in either sex is the only mark of superiority,” and she chides Selima, the Algerian native, for not being a “woman of spirit” (9, 39). Rowson, of course, knew that women could not do what they pleased. Her own prefaces to her novels, assuring moralists that she was not writing anything that could be construed as licentious, attest to the limitations on women’s voices and to the cultural need to construct a socially acceptable woman as pure/desexualized body.

Slaves in Algiers allowed Rowson to construct women’s bodies differently and to question the ideologies of womanhood in the late eighteenth century. Yet the discourse on feminism (the free and strong woman’s body) signifies on the idea of nation as liberty (the nation of free bodies) and nation as Columbia (the powerful, imperial nation) and depends on an exclusion and control of raced (Oriental) bodies, thus making women’s liberty a hierarchical, racial-cultural issue. The woman most content with her status in the harem of the dey is Selima, a native Algerian happy with the customs of her country. Fetnah, British born and Algerian reared, has always had “a natural antipathy to Moorish manners” (8). But it is Rebecca, a slave from the United States, who initiates the desire for freedom in Fetnah. As Fetnah puts it, “it was she, who nourished in my mind the love of liberty, and taught me, woman was never formed to be the abject slave of man” (9). Fetnah, the culturally mixed character, learns her lessons so well that she declares, “I am sure the woman must be blind and stupid, who would not prefer a young, handsome, good humored Christian, to an old, ugly, ill natured Turk” (40).

My point here is not to fault Rowson for succumbing to the raced hierarchies of imperialism, for to do so would be to envision an absolute, unified, oppositional subjectivity, one that denies, at the very minimum, Rowson’s split position as woman and imperial subject. A more important issue is how Rowson manages to use the dichotomous discourse to articulate feminist concerns. Rowson enriches the discourse on the Algerian Orient by embodying the nation as woman and by introducing the discourse of feminism as a critique of the nation. Her work also opens up the question of the complex relationship of white women to nationhood and empire, issues raised more forcefully in novels of missionary Orientalism written a generation later, in which the need for empire is made by appeal to persistent stereotypes, such as the Oriental woman’s “natural” inclination to passivity and slavery. Rowson’s Columbian vision is thus one of womanly virtue and initiative triumphing over the Orient, as opposed to the manly, militaristic visions of Ellison, Jones, and Smith. Within the discourses of Orientalism, Rowson’s text is a significant departure. Slaves in Algiers questions both Said’s views about Orientalism being a male discourse and Sara Mills’s argument about women writers formulating a complete break with the imperialist presumptions of their male counterparts. Instead, it suggests that women’s compromised status as imperial agents produced narratives that resulted at once in common discourses for women and an anxious racial differentiation among them.

Algerian Narrators in the New World:
Washington Irving’s Salmagundi (1808) and Peter Markoe’s The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania (1787)

Unlike the Algerian Orientalist texts discussed thus far, Washington Irving’s Salmagundi and Peter Markoe’s The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania upset the hierarchical distinctions between USAmerica and the Orient by using a comic mode in which a naïve Oriental observer, visiting the New World, inadvertently ridicules the political and social structures he
sees. Liberty, for instance, gets recast as self-indulgent and reckless anarchy, both for the public at large and for women in particular, who are coded as frivolous and giddy. Yet this exaggerated transgression of the hierarchy renews, all the more firmly, the raced and gendered distinctions on which the rhetoric of empire relies. In contrast to Rowson’s *Shores in Algiers*, Irving’s and Markoe’s texts negotiate imperial hierarchies by maintaining gendered hierarchies at home.

The nine Mustapha letters of *Salnagundi* and the letters of Mehmet in *The Algerine Spy* are presented in the form of the well-established genre of Oriental letters, the indigenizing of which demonstrates the popularity of Orientalist discourses in the country. The observations of a naive/wise Oriental traveling in the West had served effectively as a means of social satire in both France and England. Montesquieu’s *Les Lettres Persanes* (1721), popularized by the Oriental Renaissance in France, soon produced its British counterparts in George Lyttleton’s *Letters from a Persian in England to His Friend at Isphaham* (1735) and Horace Walpole’s *Letters from Xo-Ho* (1757). The trend culminated in the immensely successful *Citizen of the World; or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher* (1760) by Oliver Goldsmith. These works derived their humor from the exaggerated contrast between the Oriental observer and the society he reported on.

Both Irving and Markoe use the Oriental narrator as a means of lighthearted social satire. But if flippantry satire was all that was at stake, a European observer coming to the New World would have served the purpose just as well. For Irving, however, the Orient was more than a passing interest. Of Oliver Goldsmith, one of his favorite writers, Irving wrote, he “always [had] a great notion of expeditions to the East, and wonders to be seen and effected in the Oriental countries.” Irving suggests that for the Westerner the Orient is never simply a place of travel and inquiry but an arena for action where the agency of the Westerner “effect[s]” change. Irving’s views indicate, without questioning it, a certain assurance about the availability of the Orient as a new frontier in the cultural imaginary. The use of an Oriental observer similarly signifies a certain comic subversion of Oriental hierarchies at the same time that it assumes a rhetorical certainty about being able to speak for the Orient.

Irving’s decision to choose an Algerian narrator instead of a simply generic oriental narrator also suggests a desire to create an indigenous version of the genre of Oriental letters. The character of Mustapha, the narrator in the Oriental letters of *Salnagundi*, was in fact based on a Tripolitan prisoner. In August 1804 a Tripolitan vessel was captured by U.S. officers. In the ensuing struggle, seven Tripolitan sailors were captured, and they were brought to New York in February 1805. These sailors were the subjects of newspaper headlines in New York and the objects of great curiosity. Prominent among these sailors was one Mustapha, the captain of a ketch.

The bulk of *Salnagundi* is comprised of polite essays in the Addissonian tradition, written by three fictitious bachelor narrators—Will Wizard, Anthony Evergreen, and Launcelot Langstaff. Interestingly, in the leisureed world of the three narrators, the possession of Oriental artifacts signifies luxury and power. Will Wizard’s status depends, in part, on the fact that he has traveled to Canton, is accustomed to perusing Chinese manuscripts, and wears a waistcoat of China silk.

In Peter Markoe’s *The Algerine Spy*, the rhetoric of nation as empire is more overt. A political conversion narrative, *The Algerine Spy* comprises letters ostensibly authored by an Algerian who comes to the United States in disguise to spy for his country. Experiencing firsthand the fruits of liberty, he is won over by the new country, which he decides to make home. The ruse of a spy allows Markoe to present extended political and historical deliberations about the power of the New World. Mehmet, the spy, muses: “A new nation has started up in America, which, if actuated by ambition (and what power has long resisted its impulse) may invade, harass and subjugate several of the Spanish provinces. The enthusiasm of the invaders, the debility of the invaded, the poverty of the states and the wealth of the provinces, will render the conquest of Peru and Mexico by no means difficult.” But these ruminations about a U.S. continental empire are set in the context of Mehmet’s musings about the nature of empires, rhetorical interventions that both continue the trajectory of *Translatio Imperii* and qualitatively distinguish the United States from the rapacious empires of the past. Mehmet decides that national character distinguishes the United States from Rome: “Incapable of industry, and confined within very narrow limits, the Romans could not exist without distressing their neighbors” (27). The result of this unbounded ambition of the Romans, the narrator points out, was the destruction of the populace and civilization of Carthage. Yet the rapaciousness of Rome also serves as a warning about the unforeseen consequences of imperialistic expansion.

The major dramatic function served by the Oriental narrators and their incredulity with the country they are visiting lies in the raced and gendered contrasts they note between U.S. political liberty and Algerian
despotism, between the restrictions of the harem and the freedoms enjoyed by women in the New World. As we have seen with Tyler and Rowson, harems and harem-like spaces could be used to question sexual and gender subject positions at home. Markoe and Irving, however, use stereotypical ideas about imprisonment in the harem and about subdued Oriental women to idealize an absolute freedom for women in the United States, one that denies the restrictions in voting, property laws, and legal redress and the numerous other restrictions that women in nineteenth-century US America were subject to. Indeed, by representing US American women as frivolous, giddy creatures, outside the sphere of Enlightenment rationality and thus outside the sphere of nation and empire, Markoe and Irving can, within that circumscribed space, represent women’s sphere as free.

Many of the exaggerated and caricatured representations of the overly free women resemble the depictions of corrupting and evil women sketched by people against the “women’s question.” For instance, Benjamin Silliman, author of books of travel and a tutor at Yale, castigated Mary Wollstonecraft’s influence in the United States: “This female philosopher indignantly rejects the idea of a sex in the soul, pronouncing the sensibility, timidity and tenderness of women, to be merely artificial refinements of character, introduced and fostered by men.” Wollstonecraft’s new philosophy, Silliman declares, has induced them [women], in many instances, to expose their persons in such a manner, as to excite passion, but to extinguish respect. . . . the most beautiful actresses exhibit their persons, in robes of lawn, so transparent, and yet, so adhesive, as to discover every latent proportion and beauty. In the robes of the other sex also, they expose their delicate limbs and vainly emulate the firm step, and manly port, which nature has denied them.

Irving’s and Markoe’s descriptions of women in the United States, though in the comic vein, are strikingly similar to those of Silliman. Oriental servitude and passivity dramatize, by contrast, the unseemly freedom of US American women.

Using the rhetoric of freedom and slavery, Mustapha, the Oriental observer of Salamgundi, constantly compares the active, empowered woman of the United States with her passive, voiceless Algerian counterpart. He is shocked at the free bodies of women who, “instead of being carefully shut up in harems and seraglios, are abandoned to the direction of their own reason, and suffered to run about in perfect freedom” (412); he comments that “Eastern females,” in contrast, “shrink in blushing timidity even from the glance of a lover” (414). Mustapha notes that women in the United States are “slang-whangers” no less than the men, whereas the East values the woman’s body without agency: “Thou knowest how valuable are these silent companions—what a price is given for them in the East, and what entertaining wives they make” (53). Markoe’s narrator, Mehemet, is similarly aghast at the unguarded conversation of the women he encounters: “They spoke of their absent friends without reserve, and sometimes with acrimony. . . . I heard with astonishment more than three female voices at a time” (33). Mehemet sums up the difference between these US women and Algerian women as exemplified by his wife: “[she] is more intent to hear, than eager to speak; who satisfied with my love, aims not at the admiration of others; with whom silence is wisdom and reserve is virtue” (35).

Both works also clearly demonstrate the significance of gender to conceptions of nationhood. The representations of frivolity are intended to wake women to the tasks of being chaste and virtuous embodiments of nation so that they can be guardians of the morality of the country. Salamgundi begins and ends with concerns about the manners of women to whom the essays are directed. The narrators of Salamgundi express their hope that when enough numbers are published, the volume may be “sufficiently portable to be carried in old ladies’ pockets and young ladies’ work-bags” (4). Salamgundi is advertised, in other words, like an etiquette manual. The bachelor writers also reassure their readers that they will watch over “the guardian rules of female delicacy and decorum” (6–7). In the last essay, titled “To the Ladies,” Anthony Evergreen praises the simple, retiring, shy woman “whose blush is the soft suffusion of delicate sensibility,” in contrast to those who acquire “artificial polish . . . by perpetually mingling in the beau monde” (462). Markoe’s Algerian spy similarly concludes that the introduction of European goods and luxuries will inevitably corrupt the simplicity of the US American woman by introducing her to immoral fashions.

The observations of the Oriental narrators in Irving’s and Markoe’s texts establish the freedoms and the necessary virtues of women, who, in turn, embody New World virtue. In contrast to Algerian despotism, the United States is embodied as the land of complete liberty, even if that liberty leads to regrettable excesses, as in the case of women. Irving, whose Federalist sympathies made him cynical of republicanism, used Mustapha to satirize what he saw as a political system about to go
amok. Mustapha’s incredulity calls into question the unnecessary expense of parades that mark festive days; his genuine astonishment at politicians approaching commoners before elections and ignoring them thereafter exposes the hypocrisy engendered by the system of popular vote.

But although Irving interrupts the discourse of empire by satirizing the excesses and shortcomings of the democratic system, he also makes it clear that these very excesses characterize the United States as vibrant and changing, unlike the static despotism of the Orient. Mustapha derides the voting process and contrasts it to rule under a bashaw.

... the only solid satisfaction the multitude have reaped is, that they have got a new governor, or bashaw, whom they will praise, idolize, and exalt for a while, and afterward... they will abuse, caluminate, and trample him under foot... rejoice that, though the boasting political chattering of this logocracy cast upon thy countrymen the ignominious epithet of slaves, thou livest in a country where the people... have nothing to do but to submit to the will of a bashaw of only three tails. (321)

Even though the preceding description ostensibly critiques the “multitude,” this multitude is active, lively, empowered, and embodied as a nation/empire, whereas the Algerians are cast as passive and submissive. Like Irving, Markoe also celebrates the limitless freedoms of the United States. His Oriental narrator in The Algerine Spy, Mehemet, notes the facility with which censures of the government are accepted in the United States: “Were an Algerine supposed to have imagined only in a dream what a Pennsylvanian speaks, prints, publishes, maintains and glories in, he would suffer the severest of tortures” (67). The free American body is constructed through an exclusion of, and complete distinction from, the enslaved bodies of Algerians.

Irving and Markoe similarly use the mode of comic exaggeration to travesty the most stereotypical images of the Orient, those of the despot and his harem, while simultaneously reifying raced distinctions between liberty and enslavement. Irving’s narrator, Mustapha, talks of his obese wife, who unlike the thin women he sees, had to be carried home in a wheelbarrow; Mehemet, Markoe’s narrator, mourns the loss of his wife, who elopes with their gardener in his absence. Still, the major function of the Oriental observer is to validate the new nation as muscular and strong (a potential empire) and free (an abode of civic virtue).

While both Irving’s and Markoe’s narrators are, to an extent, stereotypes of syncretic Oriental men, there is no question that their specifically Algerian cast was particularly important to their reception with the reading public. For instance, in Salamagundi Irving uses Mustapha’s status as captured Algerian to point out the importance of giving such events as Eaton’s march iconic national significance. Mustapha pities the system of popular decision making that is destined to make Eaton sink into obscurity: “They talked away the best part of a whole winter before they could determine not to expend a few dollars in purchasing a sword to bestow on an illustrious warrior... on that very hero who frightened all our poor old women and young children at Derne.” (203).

Markoe’s The Algerine Spy ends as a veritable political conversion narrative. Mehemet, who has been declared a traitor in Algiers, gratefully receives the blessings of U.S. citizenship. Cast off from his bondage to the despot, Mehemet declares,

And thou Pennsylvania, who has promised to succour and protect the unhappy, that fly to thee for refuge, open thy arms to receive Mehemet the Algerine, who, formerly a mahometan, and thy foe, has renounced his enmity, his country and his religion, and hopes, protected by thy laws, to enjoy, in the evening of his days, the united blessings of freedom and Christianity. (129)

Through the voice of the regenerate spy, the text consolidates the idea of the nation as a sanctuary for the oppressed and the view of it as a powerful beacon that compels outsiders to recognize its power.

The Tripolitan wars spawned the first set of U.S. Orientalist works in which the New World, embodied as Columbia/Libertad, could be imaginatively seen as an empire conquering the East not simply through its might, like its European counterparts, but through its virtue. Cast as the robust, righteous male or the pure, noble woman, this image represented the rightful imperial power of the United States over a dissipated Orient. But the raced and gendered dichotomies and the exclusions on which the narrative of empire rests are radically undermined when the ideological anxieties of the nation are brought to the surface. The racial schisms, conflicts, and disruptions foregrounded in these moments reveal that the idea of the morally upright, free imperial body roaming the Orient was a necessary construct for a newly emergent nationhood.

It is also clear that questions of nationhood and empire are worked
out through questions of gender, normality, and respectability. The North African Orient, with its harems, seraglios, and deserts, provided an interesting site, often an imaginary of evil, where US-American virtue and liberty were obviously evident. This vision of virtue depended on notions of the virtue of US-American women and of the respectability of US-American men, characteristics that made possible the power of the empire. And although, as we have seen, virtue and respectability were often shown to be compromised, the rhetoric of moral nationhood was maintained through numerous panegyrics to Columbia, particularly in the opening of the essays. Through discourses of imperial nationhood in these texts, that is, attempt to contain the disruptive moments occasioned by discourses on gender.

The imaginative space occupied by the North African states was influenced by, but in no way simply mimetic of, the historical events of the US alteration. In fact, in 1797, when eighty-two survivors of Algerian captivity arrived in Philadelphia, they were greeted by a crowd of spectators and wined and dined just for one day. Some small effort was made to collect contributions for them, but on the next day their case was forgotten by the newspapers. What the enslavement signified was more important. The symbolic threat to sovereignty generated numerous attempts at embodying the nation as a virtuous, manly empire that the North African nations would soon recognize as a formidable power. In the geographical imaginary, the North African Orient was to become one of the frontiers of the US empire and would be commemorated (along with Mexico) in a line in the nineteenth-century "Marine's Hymn," "From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli." 63

Missionary Colonialism, Egyptology, Racial Borderlands, and the Satiric Impulse:
M. M. Ballou, William Ware, John DeForest, Maria Susanna Cummins, David F. Dorr

The Orientalist writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was occasioned by the immediate diplomatic crises of the Algerian altercation. It reflected the nationalist fervor and revolutionary zeal of a newly formed nation and the indignation of writers at the enslavement of fellow citizens by the Algerians. The nation, embodied as virtue and liberty, was seen as a regenerative, moral power, needed to awaken and enlighten a torpid Algerian culture. Yet the critique of slavery that framed the embodiment of the nation ensured that nationhood and slavery, free and unfree bodies, were interlinked. Christian slavery in Algiers, no matter how deplorable, mirrored back African slavery and the racial schisms of the nation.

By the mid-nineteenth century, racial attitudes both within the country and in colonial Europe had hardened considerably. Native American dispossession was legalized through the Indian Removal Act of 1830, while fears of black emancipation prompted many people to zealously pursue raced ethnographic research. Samuel George Morton's Gravina Americana (1839) and Gravina Egyptica (1844) were lauded by Southern apologists for separating the "Negro" race from other races. Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon's Types of Mankind (1854) further established the irreducible cultural and moral differences among races.