ing a common vocabulary and resting on shared assumptions. Their seemingly divergent perspectives were outgrowths of one common experience: the enslavement of people of color. And the assumptions on which they all rested had been mapped onto free people of color in the course of gradual emancipation.

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A "Negro Spirit":
Em-bodying Difference

More ominous in some respects than the mapping of servility and dependency, once thought to derive from the state of being enslaved, onto free people of color generally was the developing perception by whites of this new amalgam, "free" and "of color," as a problem, a dangerous embodiment of disorder and disruption that represented a threat to the stability of the republic. The emerging status of people of color as a "free" people appeared as both a symptom and a catalyst of disorder. By 1835 many whites probably agreed with J. Jacobus Flournoy that "the every riot at Electional meetings, attest[s] the pervadence of a negro spirit," and that "[negroes] are, as I believe, a direct agent of Satan, to the destruction of order and the distracting of the mind."[1]

Several factors contributed to the power of this idea. First, the very wrenching apart of two halves of a seemingly indivisible term, "negro slavery"—and the recombination of the first, long a virtual synonym for slave, with a term heretofore principally reserved for white, male, republican citizens—challenged the accustomed social order as reflected in conventional language. In colonial new England, "free" was commonly associated with "men" in "freemen" to identify that 40 to 75 percent of adult white males who were eligible to vote in town meetings: owners of freehold

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[1] J. Jacobus Flournoy, *An Essay on the Origin, Habits, Etc. of the African Race: Incidental to the Propriety of Having Nothing to Do with Negroes: Addressed to the Good People of the United States* (New York, 1835), p. 42.

estates of a certain size, eldest sons of such owners over the age of twenty-one, men who paid sufficient rent on real estate.[2] The very terms "free negro" and "free person of color" were hybrids that reconstituted the social order. Thus free people of color formed a disruptive element of the community by their constitution as a category of being.

Second, "free" seemed to be synonymous with "uncontrolled" when it applied to people of color, "self-controlled" when it described white citizens. Slaves were by definition persons controlled by others; emancipation freed them from external control, but did not ensure the development of self-control in its stead. Whites believed that free people of color, lacking a history of self-control, could be expected to behave in socially disruptive ways.

Abolitionists, too, had seen the problem as a matter of managing the adjustment of a formerly enslaved people to freedom, not one of encouraging (or legislating) the adjustment of a slaveowning people to an inclusive expansion of their franchise. But leaders such as Levi Hart had argued strenuously against the expectation of slaves' becoming "more vicious & disorderly, & in particular, more given to stealing by being made free. . . . There is no apparent want of capacity in the Negros in general to conduct their own affairs & provide for themselves but what is the natural consequence of the Servile state they are in, & the treatment they receive." Hart and others had insisted that "common interest with others in the support of good order & preservation [of] private property" and "gratitude to the white people for procuring their liberty would tend strongly to unite them to our interest." In this view, emancipation would strengthen the social order.[3]

But the emergence of a class of free people of color, beginning as it did in the 1780s during a period of intense postwar economic hardship and political and social uncertainty, proved to be a disruptive phenomenon. A decade into gradual emancipation, (twenty years after Hart had made his arguments), abolitionists' expectations that it would enhance social order were unfulfilled. Eager to take credit for saving white society from itself by eradicating a sinful institution, abolitionists moved to assert leadership in the efforts to manage free people of color—in a sense, to assume the role being vacated by slaveowners—by attempting to replace coercion with moral guidance.

A broadside issued a little over a decade into the emancipation process by the national Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies in the United States, addressed "To the free Africans and other free People of color in the United States," offers considerable insight into the discourse of gratitude and betrayal, obligation and entitlement, disorder and control in which the "problem" of free people of color unfolded at the turn of the nineteenth century.[4] Issued in May 1797, it resonates with disappointment and frustration at the failure of the freed people to behave as Hart and the other abolitionists had promised they would. The statement of the president of the convention, Joseph Bloomfield, opens with a self-description of the convention delegates "assembled for the purpose of promoting your happiness" as "your sincerest friends." It urges "strict and faithful observance" of the advice of the preceding year, reviewed in the second half of the broadside, in order to "justify the solicitude and labors of your friends in your behalf." This message constructs free people of color as indebted to the abolitionists for their freedom and bound to behave virtuously in order to pay off their debt, evoking Hart's earlier expectation that gratitude would motivate free people of color to behave in socially acceptable ways. The message notes that "many of you have evinced, by your prudent and moral conduct, that you are not unworthy of the freedom you enjoy," implying reproachfully that many others have not evinced such worthiness. Far from a natural right, freedom here is to be earned; the implication for children born after passage of the 1784 statute (the oldest of whom would have been thirteen) is that after working for eighteen or twenty-one years to repay the slaveholder for raising them, they could anticipate a lifetime of further repayment to abolitionists in the form of constrained behavior.

Besides adding one new admonition against gambling, the message then restates the specific "advice" originally provided in the message from the convention of a year earlier: nine injunctions concerning many of the areas of "disorderly" behavior that would be the target of escalating condemnation and legal action during the first three decades of the nineteenth century throughout New England. In addition to (1) regularly attending public worship services (to "evince gratitude" yet again, this time to "your CREATOR"), free people of color were encouraged to (2) ac-

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[2] Requirements of freemanship varied, but Rhode Island's were typical: owners of freehold estates in excess of £40 ($134 after 1798), eldest sons of such freemen when they reached twenty-one years of age, and those who paid in excess of 40 shillings ($6.75) in annual rent on real estate could be admitted as freemen. Ruth Herndon reviews these rules and the sources of the estimates of eligibility in "Governing the Affairs of the Town: Continuity and Change in Rhode Island, 1750–1800" (Ph.D. diss., American University, 1992), pp. 89–91.

[3] Levi Hart, "Some Thoughts on the Subject of freeing the Negro Slaves in the Colony of Connecticut, humbly offered to the Consideration of all friends to liberty & Justice" (c. 1775), p. 4, Miscellaneous Manuscripts (typescript by Doris E. Cook, manuscript cataloguer), Connecticut Historical Society.

[4] The Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies in the United States [Joseph Bloomfield, President], "To the Free Africans and other free People of color in the United States," Broadside Collection, Boston Public Library.

quire education in "useful branches" and also (3) learn "useful trades"; (4) be diligent, simple and frugal; (5) abjure drinking and (6) "frolicking and amusements" that "beget habits of dissipation and vice," these in turn leading to "deserved reproach amongst your white neighbours"; (7) contract legal marriages and register all births and deaths; (8) save money and invest it; and (9) be "civil and respectful" to "remove every just occasion of complaint," since "it is by your good conduct alone that you can refute the objections which have been made against you as rational and moral creatures, and remove many of the difficulties, which have occurred in the general emancipation of such of your brethren as are yet in bondage."[5]

Here are identified virtually all the standards of conduct by which free people of color would be judged worthy or unworthy of the freedom they had received: usefulness, controlled sexuality, public and private passivity and invisibility—in other words, behavior appropriate to well-disciplined slaves. By failing in sizable numbers to meet these standards, they would betray a crucial aspect of the covenant made between Revolutionary-era abolitionists and white citizens: that once free, well-managed people of color would preserve the public order of white citizens by becoming just like them and remaining nothing at all like them simultaneously—in short, by remaining ideally slavelike.

Accusations of "disturbing the public peace" and "disorderly conduct" against people of color increased dramatically between 1784 and 1830. Repeatedly, called before town councils for "riotous behavior in the Street" were individuals such as "a young person of color who calls himself Samuel Crawford," or "the mulatto woman called Boston Nance who conducts herself in a riotous disorderly manner."[6] Their disorderly behavior was sharply defined by gender, however: women of color were characterized as disorderly in terms of sexually transgressive behavior; men, in terms of an alleged propensity for violence. The sources of this gender distinction lay less in the actual differences in the behavior of males and females than in the way those differences resonated with the conception "free negro" or "free person of color" as the embodiment of miscegenation.

The earliest concern of colonial legislators regarding the slave trade was the fear of "race" mixing, expressed clearly in the 1705–6 Massachusetts bill taxing the importation of "Negroes" for the "Preventing of a Spurious and Mixt Issue."[7] "Race" mixing in the context of slavery involved an in-

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Providence Town Council Records, 7:442, March 28, 1800; 7:419–20, December 25, 1799.
[7] *Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, 1692–1704*

terconnected set of transgressions against community standards of propriety and the property rights of white citizens, acts seen as extremely disruptive of the social order. This perspective is reflected in the earliest colonial ordinance that addressed such mixing, published in New Netherland in 1638: "Each and every one must refrain from Fighting, Adulterous Intercourse with heathens, Blacks, or other persons, Mutiny, Theft, False Swearing, Calumny and other Immoralities."[8] All those proscribed behaviors were seen as potentially disruptive of community peace, either because they were violent in and of themselves or because they challenged the claims of rightful authority and ownership (over wives, children, slaves, other property) that undergirded the social order.

In the context of slavery, "mixt issue" initially seemed to represent a straightforward problem of managing investments. Colonial New England custom dictated that the "mixt issue" of a white woman and a male slave would be free, following the condition of the mother, and thus would constitute in some sense a value lost to the owner that might have been gained had his slave impregnated another of his slaves. Conversely, the child of a white male and a slave woman would represent an increase in the slaveowner's property.[9] The 1705–6 act of the Massachusetts General Court that taxed slave imports to prevent "race" mixing also provided punishments for fornication in an apparent attempt to prevent contractual relationships from interfering with established property rights in slaves. It prescribed sale out of the province for any "negro or molatto" man who should fornicate with an English woman or a woman of any other Christian nation, and severe whipping for both offenders; here, the slave's action could result in the direct loss of the slave's value to the owner. If the man were English or of another Christian nationality and the woman "negro or molatto," he would be whipped and fined, she sold out of the province (but not whipped); here again, "race" mixing would result in substantial loss to the slaveowner. (Failure to prescribe whipping for the transgressive female slave suggests recognition of her vulnerability to coercion.) The act further required a white father to maintain the child, a white mother either to maintain the child independently or to be bound out for the child's maintenance. Finally, the act also prohibited anyone English, Scottish, or of an-

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(Boston: Wright and Potter, 1869), I:578, 579, in Lorenzo Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 51.

[8] *Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 1638–1674*, comp. and trans. by E. B. O'Callaghan (Albany, 1868), p. 12, in David H. Fowler, *Northern Attitudes toward Interracial Marriage: Legislation and Public Opinion in the Middle Atlantic and the States of the Old Northwest, 1780–1930* (New York: Garland, 1987), p. 33.

[9] Fowler, *Northern Attitudes toward Interracial Marriage*, pp. 33–100, discusses the legal development of the growing distinction between the races in American law.

other Christian nationality from contracting matrimony with any "negro or molatto." Like the others, this last provision can be interpreted as protection of private property.[10]

These regulations may also be read as attempts to police the female body in general, black and white, as the site of "race" mixing, and David H. Fowler argues that in fact it was the specter of the white female body as the source of "mixt issue" that provoked passage of the act: several cases of bastardy involving sexual relations between white men and women of color had produced no legal response, whereas the 1705–6 act was passed immediately following two cases involving illicit sexual relations between white women and men of color which were tried in the Massachusetts Court of General Sessions (Fowler may be mistaking sequence for causation here, however).[11] The willingness to impose whipping sanctions on free white females but not on enslaved black ones might suggest greater outrage at the notion that white women could actively prefer the sexual attentions of men of color to those of white men; on the other hand, it might merely suggest recognition of the powerless position of female slaves or the desire to protect property. In any case, laws of this kind were only formal measures reinforcing the more common, everyday institutional arrangements that discouraged "race" mixing: the patriarchal social order among white colonists, which served to contain the sexual behavior of white women to some extent within the boundaries of (at least prospective) marriage; and slavery itself, which provided a set of behavioral codes and restrictions for enslaved women of color.

As long as slavery existed primarily in the context of the family, the rigid patriarchal order of the New England household served to restrain "race" mixing (although sexual relations across "race" were certainly not unknown within family households). Once substantial numbers of persons of color were no longer confined within white family households, however, relations across "race" became ungovernable, a manifest threat to the con-

ventional social order. The body of the free woman of color, cast out of the white family's patriarchal institutional structure and no longer constrained by the bonds of slavery, constituted an uncontrollable site of potential race mixing. After 1780, as the number of free people of color and children of mixed "race" as well began to increase dramatically, the number of women of color accused of "disorderly behavior" rose significantly.

By 1800 it was not unusual for women of color to be charged before the Providence Town Council with "disorderly behavior," behaving "in a very disorderly manner," or being "a disturber of the Public peace"; they included "a Certain black Woman a transient Person known by the Name of Crazy Cate," "Betsy Stanton a black woman," and "Mary Keene, transient Mulatto." In April and May alone, six different women of color were removed from Providence as "disorderly." Sometimes the accusation was slightly more explicit: Lydia Morgan was removed to Newport for being "a person of bad fame"; Betsey Sisco, a "mulatto girl about fourteen whose conduct is represented to this Council to be such as to make it improper She should be at Large," was incarcerated and, nine days later, bound out to the age of eighteen.[12]

The charge of moral disorder adhered to liaisons between black men and white women as well, but to a lesser extent and often with less severe consequences. Bristol Rhodes, a Revolutionary veteran with a $60 annual pension, was removed from Providence to Cranston, his birthplace, on the grounds "that said Bristol keeps a house of bad fame and reputation, and that he is an unsuitable person to reside in this town" because "he keeps a white woman of lewd character in his house" but "is not married to the woman aforesaid, and has no children by her." Sally Hutson, a sixteen-year-old white woman, was ordered to depart Providence for East Greenwich, her father's home, within twenty-four hours after she explained that she had "no home except at the Houses of black People." When one Mrs. Manuel made two poignant appeals in 1822 to the Providence Town Council "with a soriful heart" to remove a girl named Hannah Johnson, who was "distressing my family daly by taking the Suport they ought to have" (apparently by having distracted Mr. Manuel from his family duties), she characterized Hannah as "a ridiculous Charicter" who "lives in a hous with one Laskill a Colourd man."[13] Evidently Mrs. Manuel believed that Hannah Johnson's living arrangements constituted the key bit of damning evidence needed to push the council into removing her.

The "moral disorder" of white men of means who lived equally uncon-

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[10] *Acts and Resolves . . . of Massachusetts Bay,* 1:578, in Fowler, *Northern Attitudes toward Interracial Marriage,* p. 50. Fowler and others have read southern prohibitions on miscegenation as evidence of early racial antipathy. I think that such readings impose a twentieth-century notion of "race" on a phenomenon that predates it and underestimate the degree to which relations within slavery, North and South, were conditioned by the economics of the institution. Bastardy, regardless of the "race" of the actors, was as much an economic as a moral issue in the colonies, as the careful assignment of responsibility for support in this and similar legislation attests. See Richard Burn, *The Justice of the Peace, and Parish Officer,* 12th ed., 4 vols (London: Strahan & Woodfall, 1772), a compilation with commentary of the entire development of English Law to the date of its publication. American town councillors, selectmen, justices of the peace, etc., used this as a guide to implementing American colonial law well into the nineteenth century. American laws of bastardy and settlement were modeled on British law throughout the colonial period; see esp. 1:305–13. I am indebted to Ruth Herndon for recommending Burn to my attention.

[11] Fowler, *Northern Attitudes toward Interracial Marriage,* p. 51.

[12] Providence Town Council Records, 8:14, December 15, 1800; 8:16, January 1, 1801; 7:511, September 3, 1800; 7:453–54, April–May, 1800; 8:263, June 20, 1803; 8:22, January 19, 1801.

[13] Providence Town Papers 111: 52, August 26, 1822; and 111:53, October 7, 1822.

ventional lives and who likewise consorted with women of color could be more easily ignored. A good example of an upstanding citizen whose reputation seems to have remained unblemished by the irregularity of his personal life was the prominent Benjamin Bowen of Providence, whose 1783 will distributed a large estate among his natural children by two named women and one unnamed one, another child who also may have been his offspring, and his slave Sylvia, apparently his current mistress, whom he also freed. Bowen's will was probated without objection or comment, Governor Arthur Fenner serving as executor.[14]

The patterns of "race" mixing that developed after the passage of the emancipation statutes were viewed by whites as alarming even though they actually represented a slow withdrawal of people of color from their relative integration within the communities of the whites whose slaves they had been into more solidly black communities on the margins of white neighborhoods. In fact, whites paradoxically found dense communities of color to be as disturbing as mixed communities, since in neither case were the people of color any longer reliably under white control. Whites developed new strategies to contain and control the spaces used and inhabited by people of color and the activities that took place there, especially those that mixed the "races."

From the earliest years of slavery, when slaves lived in white households and could find occasional refuge from constant surveillance only by slipping away to private spaces to enjoy gatherings and entertainments, whites had attempted to police the recreational choices of people of color. Beginning in 1693 in Massachusetts the New England colonies had passed a series of laws forbidding licensed innkeepers and private housekeepers alike from entertaining combinations of whites and slaves, or Indians and slaves, or free persons of color and slaves—all thought to be volatile mixtures of unlike kinds of persons. Some of these laws also sought to prevent the sale of liquor to free white minors and free and enslaved persons of color—that is, people assumed to lack self-control, whose consorting and drinking together were construed to be disruptive of the public peace. For example, in the early 1750s, complaint was made in South Kingstown that "one Jacob a M[ul]atto man keepeth a Disorderly house frolicking entertaining Servants &c"; the case was dismissed, "he having promised to Suffer no Disorders For Future." A year later, also in South Kingstown, complaint was made against Christopher Fowler, a white tavern owner, "for Keeping a Disorderly house allowing people to play Cards and Entertaining Indeons Negros &c"; this case was dismissed when no one appeared to press the

complaint. In Boston the selectmen ordered retailers not to "sell or deliver rum and other spiritous liquors to Negro and Mullatto servants, not bringing certificates from their masters" and not to "allow [such] persons to sit tippling in their houses." These efforts to restrain the disorder thought to be associated with the free use of liquor, lack of supervision, and unrestrained mixing of free and enslaved, white and nonwhite people continued after 1784, as more and more people of color themselves became able to provide opportunities for such behavior. In 1785 the Newport City Court heard the case of Thomas Ferguson, "a Negro man" accused of "entertaining slaves in his house and permitting them to dance there." His case was dismissed. But by 1822 the formal licenses issued by the City of Providence "to retail strong liquors" often included a clause forbidding the grantee from allowing "any person of colour to take charge of his store."[15]

Drinking and "frolicking" in taverns and private homes in the neighborhoods of free people of color was seen as even more threatening when it spilled out into public spaces in the very late evening. In an earlier time, slaveowners could be counted on to help enforce laws such as those in Boston forbidding "Negroes and mulattoes" from carrying sticks or canes in public places and from being on the streets at all after nine o'clock at night.[16] By the turn of the century, in an attempt to curb what they saw as the increasing threat to the public welfare presented by disorderly free people of color and mixed groups in the streets late at night, town councils were ordering night watchmen to detain, question, and incarcerate people committing "disorderly" acts. For example, in November 1799 the Providence Town Council ordered the night watch to "suppress riotous conduct in the streets, to commit all refactory persons to Bridewell" (a detention facility); the order did not target a specific group, but four of the next six individuals so detained were persons of color. Four months later, apparently after the night watch reported instances of resistance to their questioning, the council stretched the definition of disorderly conduct to include unresponsiveness and voted that anyone walking around in the streets after eleven o'clock who should refuse to give his name to a night watchman should be deemed disorderly and detained. The next detainee was "a Person of Color who calls himself Samuel Crawford," accused of "Ri-

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[14] Providence Town Council Records, 8:173, July 12, 1802; 8:395–96, August 13, 1804.

[15] Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, pp. 134–37, offers a litany of laws governing consorting and drinking in public houses and private homes in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. South Kingstown Town Council and Probate Records, 4:22, February 10, 1752, and 4:224, February 12, 1753; *Records of the Boston Selectmen, 1754–1763* 19 (1887): 7 (August 12, 1761); Newport City Court Records, January 11, 1785; Providence Town Papers, 111:142.

[16] Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, p. 299.

otous behavior in the Street." Samuel was fortunate enough to be discharged.[17]

These measures sought to regulate spaces usually controlled by men, where men gathered. The form of disorder whites feared from men of color, and from the mixing of enslaved and free men of color with white men and boys in taverns and in the streets, was violence, or violent resistance to authority. Until the advent of gradual emancipation, virtually all persons of color lived in white-dominated households, and thus domestic spaces were not seen as potential sites of disorder on the part of people of color. But by the 1780s, as independent communities of free people of color inevitably grew in size and steadily edged away from white presence and authority, residence itself began to attract attention as the perceived locus of disorder. As white officials tried to regulate the living situations of free people of color, a gendered distinction emerged: moral disorder was the province of women in the activities of the household and, more particularly, the bedroom; civic disorder was the province of men.

Women of color were often accused of running "a disorderly house," frequently a euphemism for a brothel but often merely a boardinghouse that catered to a mixed clientele. Public officials only reflected private sentiment; as early as 1782 a mob pulled down the house of Margaret Bowler, alias Fairchild, who had rented the old jail in Providence five years earlier for $1,400 (paper money) a year to use as a boardinghouse. Upon examination by the town council, Margaret listed the occupants of her house as Phebe Bowen, Betsy Bowen, "another white woman called Debby," Black Bets, and "a Molatto girl of eighteen or nineteen years." Even though Margaret's yearly rent qualified her for legal settlement and she had been an unfortunate victim of illegal mob violence, the council had her removed to Newport. Again in 1783 and in 1784, Providence mobs destroyed "disorderly" houses of black women. Likewise, the Reverend John Eliot reported in 1795 that relations between blacks and whites in Boston were generally harmonious "except in houses of ill-fame where some very depraved white females get among the blacks," which had resulted in "the pulling down of such houses at times."[18] The riots of white mobs against people of color which flared in Providence, Hartford, Boston, and elsewhere in the 1820s and 1830s were foreshadowed by the violence of the 1780s and 1790s surrounding the emergence of free people of color as a visible and disturbing class.

Often, public officials actively undermined the independence of women of color, and especially the independence of their sexuality, in their efforts to control spaces in which "race" mixing might take place. For example, in January 1802 Margaret Simons, a woman of color, was confined to Bridewell for disorderly conduct and only released "provided she goes to work in some family and does not set up the Keeping of a House in this place." Margaret may have submitted to wage work for a time, but in 1804 she was again running a boardinghouse, according to Sarah Babcock, a transient woman of color who testified that she lived there.[19] The sexual activity of people of color was construed to be disorderly even when it did not involve "race" mixing, in that it often ignored or defied community rules and conventions. Legal marriage, legitimacy of births, legal settlement—all these were tests of suitability for community acceptance, tests that people of color frequently failed. Although whites too often failed to marry legally and to gain legal settlement, people of color were publicly questioned on these matters and suffered punishments as a consequence in grossly disproportionate numbers.

Women of color, and sometimes men as well, were frequently required to give explicit evidence of the legitimacy of their family arrangements to public officials. Sylvia Taylor, "a Mulatto Woman" of South Kingstown, Rhode Island, insisted to the Providence Town Council in 1795 that she had been married to James Helme, but the clerk reported that she was "ignorant of the person who married her, has no marriage certificate, has a female Child of the Age of Nine Months"—clearly responses to skeptical questioning. Sylvia was removed to South Kingstown forthwith. Five years later, when the marriage of Robert Lovett, "a black man born in Guinea," was questioned, he was able to name a "Mr. Waldo of Attleborough" as the man who had legally married him to Maria Mends of Mindon, Massachusetts, eight years before.[20]

The spaces occupied by people of color began to be seen as threatening to the civic order when the density of independent black households on the margins of white neighborhoods increased after the 1780s. At the first federal census, in 1790, nearly 64 percent of free people of color were living in independent households in Boston, at least 65 percent in Providence and in New Haven.[21] Because census takers in these towns and cities

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[17] Providence Town Council Records, 7:419–20, November 25, 1799; 7:440, March 3, 1800; 7:442, March 28, 1800.

[18] Ibid., 7:442, March 28, 1800; 8:138, January 10, 1802; 5:212–13, July 24, 1782; 7:453–54; 5:231, May 5, 1783; 5:293, November 1, 1784; Newport Town and City Council Records, City Court of Newport Minutes, January 11, 1785; *Massachusetts Historical Society Collections*, 5th ser., 3 (1891):383.

[19] Providence Town Council Records, 8:138, January 20, 1802; 8:140, January 28, 1802; 8:355, January 27, 1804.

[20] Ibid., 7:66–67, December 17, 1795; 8:1, November 12, 1800.

[21] The source for these numbers is the following series of volumes by state: Bureau of the Census, *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1908), Rhode Island, Providence Town, pp. 33–37; Massachusetts, Boston Town, pp. 183–95; Connecticut, New Haven City, pp. 102–5. Because the totals given for "all other free persons" (free persons of color) for "Hartford Town" can-

recorded household information as they moved physically through neighborhoods, names listed consecutively can be assumed to represent physically contiguous households; on this basis the census lists suggest that 27 percent of free people of color in Providence lived in proximity to at least two other households of color, and more than 16 percent lived in groups of four households or more. In Boston nearly 23 percent of free people of color lived in groups of four households or more and over 12 percent in proximity to at least six other black households. (Lack of nearby black households did not necessarily isolate individuals: five of the black households isolated in white neighborhoods in Boston each had ten or more members.) In New Haven, with a much smaller population of free people of color, none lived in groups of four or more black households and less than 16 percent in three, but 38 percent lived next to at least one other household of color.

Black residential neighborhoods began to attract increasingly negative attention as sites of disorder after 1800. Boardinghouses continued to arouse the wrath of white leaders for attracting transients, sailors (many of whom were persons of color), and "loose" women. In October of that year, for example, Jenny Rhodes, a white woman, was given a week to depart from Providence because she was running a boardinghouse for black sailors; when she had failed to leave in a month's time, she was bound out to service.[22] But a new problem began to emerge at the same time: complaints about "tenements" housing black residents began to appear in public records as an even greater threat to the public welfare. For example, on February 7, 1800, the Providence Town Council voted to empower the town treasurer, Samuel Nightingale, to hire a lawyer to prosecute a white doctor, Thomas Greene, "for admitting into one of his Tenements to reside, certain transient black people." Two of these residents, Jacob Hull and Katy Holden, appeared before the council to testify that they indeed lived together in Greene's tenement, quarters rented by Katy's mother, Margaret Holden, who now lived "in" as a servant to a Captain Page else-

where in Providence. A week later Greene appeared before the council, to beg that he not be prosecuted, and charges were dropped upon payment of costs. But a year later the council was still warning out black transients such as Margaret Simmons, "who said she lived in a house belonging to Doct. Thomas Greene." In the meantime, one Stephen Harris had also come under fire for renting a tenement he owned to James Merrit, "a black man."[23] Efforts to prosecute whites who rented to transients of color subsided after a couple of years, probably because the landlords were so frequently prosperous and well-known citizens, but tenement dwellers themselves continued to be targets of official surveillance and interrogation.

The growing concern on the part of Providence officials over disorder in black neighborhoods was exacerbated by outbreaks of yellow fever, which had raged intermittently since the 1790s. The epidemic of 1800–1801 focused new attention on living conditions in the tenements as a threat to public health as well as to peace and safety, attention that continued after yellow fever had subsided as a specific threat. Since established medical opinion linked noxious smells with disease, the special health committee assigned to patrol the streets to identify nuisances paid particular attention to low-lying areas with poor drainage and to crowded conditions that produced large amounts of garbage and overflowing necessaries—in other words, the areas along the river where the tenements had been built.[24] A report of the council's Committee on Nuisances in 1821 is typical: "Where there are four black families crowded into a small house as in this instance having no other means of disposing of their filth, except laying it in the Street there will all ways be a nuisance evented in a few days." Tellingly, the same committee also complained soon after about the yard and privy of "John Brown Keeper of the sailor boardinghouse."[25]

Another consequence of the yellow fever epidemic of 1800 was the worsening economic conditions it created. According to a letter drafted by the Providence Town Council, although the disease was confined principally to the south part of town, "the alarm occasioned thereby has induced about one third of the Inhabitants (comprising the most wealthy) to leave their abodes, this with the Stoppage of the Coasting trade and the Suspension of the necessary Supplies from the Country, and the general stag-

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not be generated by adding numbers of persons in columns so headed (i.e., the totals do not tally), Hartford is not used as an example here. Robert J. Cottrol, *The Afro-Yankees: Providence's Black Community in the Antebellum Era* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982), states that only 26.8 percent of all blacks were living in independent black households in 1790 and that "only 44 of 276 blacks listed in the census were slaves" (pp. 47–49). But since the 1790 census for Providence accounts for 48 slaves and 427 "other [nonwhite] free persons," I am at a loss to explain his figures or his conclusions. A calculation of the percentage of all people of color, free and enslaved, who lived in independent households would yield 58.3 percent in Providence, 40.1 percent in New Haven, and 63.2 percent in Boston (where no slaves were reported). Of course, I am using the numbers here to make a point somewhat different from Cottrol's.

[22] Providence Town Council Records, 7:568, October 28, 1800; 8:6, November 28, 1800.

[23] Ibid., 8:431, February 7 and 15, 1800; 8:46, March 17, 1801; 8:450, April 26, 1800.

[24] Ruth Wallis Herndon, "Clearing the Public Ways: Animal Pollution and Animal Control in 18th Century Rhode Island" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association, Nashville, Tennessee, October 28, 1994), describes the evolution of the late eighteenth-century efforts of Rhode Island officials to beautify and sanitize urban environments.

[25] Providence Town Papers, 111 (1821–22): 30, 60.

nation of business has operated greatly to the disadvantage of the laboring poor who are destitute of employ." As a precautionary measure, the council put on a special watch in the affected area "to prevent looting."[26] Here, the "laboring poor" themselves were considered a kind of secondary infection, threatening to invade and destroy terrain already ravaged by yellow fever. This particular letter makes no overt reference to people of color, but their concentration in the waterfront tenements in the south part of town suggests that they were part of the perceived threat. Indeed, a month after the letter was drafted the council ordered that a census of all blacks, as well as transient whites in poor circumstances, be undertaken, and four months later it voted to pay one Henry Alexander for "reporting the number of blacks in the south part of Town."[27] And once more, in June 1822, the Providence Town Council ordered a written census of people of color on the pretext of notifying them that "if they receive into their Houses or Possessions any transient white persons or colored people to reside . . . they will be prosecuted." On this basis the council secured, ostensibly as evidence that "such persons have been duly notified," a written list of names of "all Coloured people in this Town who are Housekeepers" and adult family members, an enumeration of their children, and an identification of the "Owners of the Houses & Tenements wherein they reside."[28]

By the early 1800s, then, "disorder" had come to characterize free black people as a collectivity partly as the imaginative reconstitution of their dependency: whites saw them as unmanaged, incapable of self-management, and thus requiring management by whites. But this characterization was also in part a response to the actual forms of their resistance to continued efforts to subordinate them. The examinations of transients and other sources reveal that as whites ignored or failed to grasp the meaning of black freedom, many people of color refused to engage or acknowledge whites' institutional frameworks such as "legal settlement" and "racial identity." People of color *were* disorderly: that is, they refused (or failed, as whites often saw it) to order themselves according to institutional rules that disadvantaged them.

People of color flagrantly disregarded the statutory requirements for obtaining "legal settlement" in towns and cities, living where they chose and returning to their desired places of residence repeatedly after being warned out, even when threatened with whippings or confinement in a

workhouse. For example, Zelph Carpenter, warned out of Providence in 1784, returned in 1787 and was confined to the "cage" in the workhouse and then whipped ten stripes. Notwithstanding, she returned in November of the same year, winning permission to stay for a week if she would then depart, on pain of twenty stripes if she did not. Seventeen years later Zelph was back before the council. Jacob Hull was examined and warned out sometime before 1800 and again in February, April, and November of 1800. Four years later he appeared before the town council yet again concerning his legal settlement; a new set of council members, apparently unaware of his previous visits, merely warned him out again instead of escalating his punishment.[29]

The resistance of free people of color to the requirements of legal settlement suggests more than simple determination to flout rules for the sake of doing so. The towns in which free people of color had been born, many as slaves or statutory servants, offered relatively few employment opportunities and represented associations of dependency that many were anxious to leave behind. There were few reasons for free people of color to remain at "home," and many reasons to leave. Some transient blacks representing themselves as free had never been legally emancipated. In any case, port cities such as Boston and Providence offered employment opportunities unavailable elsewhere. Large numbers of men of color became sailors, the most "racially" mixed occupational group in the early antebellum period.[30]

The presence of free people of color was merely the most visible and, to whites, irritating symptom of the growing disjuncture between the traditional New England community—organized around such concepts as legal settlement—and the ever more mobile and fractured, commercially oriented society of 1800 and after, to which community leaders tried vainly to continue to apply the old rules. The whole notion of legal settlement was predicated upon stasis: the idea of maintaining internal stability within communities as relatively closed systems by repelling external elements that might disturb the fragile balance of need and resources sustained by interdependent people enacting roles transmitted relatively unchanged

[26] Providence Town Council Records, 7:543, September 29, 1800; and 7:547, October 1, 1800.

[27] Ibid., 7:575, November 6, 1800; 8:41, March 11, 1801.

[28] Providence Town Papers, 112 (1821–22): 118.

[29] Providence Town Council Records, 6:13, July 7, 1787; 6:28, November 7, 1787; 7:443, April 1, 1800; 8:358, January 27, 1804.

[30] James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), pp. 25–39, discusses black migration to Boston. The Providence Town Council Records and Town Papers provide compelling evidence of the migration of people of color to the city from outlying Rhode Island towns as well as from Connecticut and Massachusetts towns. W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), documents the considerable presence of African Americans in the New England maritime trades.

through generations. The rapid transformation of a class of dependent, subordinated workers within a system of household production into a class of free, independent wage workers could not be accommodated by communities in which there was not as yet a substantial demand for industrial wage labor; the shrinking availability of unsettled land was forcing numbers of whites, too, into outmigration or wage labor. Free people of color constituted an element of disorder merely by virtue of being a new category in a system with no space to accommodate it. Then, too, this new category emerged during the particularly disabling and disruptive period of economic hardship that followed the Revolution in the mid-1780s, when the economy was less able to absorb either new workers or the newly destitute, and former slaveowners were less able to pay wages to former slaves than they might have been a decade earlier and would be a decade later.

Tenement dwellers and "transients" eking out a living as day laborers or threatening to become public charges, however, were not the only groups of people of color to constitute a disruptive element. By 1800 a stubbornly achieving black working class and tiny middle class, located most visibly in cities such as Hartford, Boston, and Providence, represented disorder in quite a different way. Their measure of success in inserting themselves into the economic structure constituted yet another of the paradoxes represented by the very existence of free people of color. In communities still bound by the conception of economic, social, and political position as constituting one's integrated status—one's "place" in society—the appearance of free people of color as independent players was revolutionary. It seemed a forcible entry, a violent overthrow of assumptions about the neat configuration of citizenship, virtue, and economic success embodied in "free men," who as late as 1780 could be assumed to be white.

Before 1780 the few, anomalous free persons of color could be construed as exemplars of that old chestnut, the exception that proves the rule. The rare painter, poet, mathematician, or entrepreneur of color could be "taken up" as some sort of prodigy, often regarded as a product of white philanthropy or at least sufferance. Phillis Wheatley, Benjamin Baneker, and Paul Cuffe were thus understood and applauded. It could be argued that the attention paid to such unique black "geniuses" in the eighteenth century served principally to demonstrate the unbridgeable chasm between them and the multitude of people of color, for whom such achievements were unthinkable. But by 1800, considerable numbers of "free men" were people of color, people onto whom the characteristics previously associated with the status of slave had been unquestioningly mapped, as we have seen. How, then, could whites interpret the rising numbers of people of color whose relative prosperity could not be discounted

as a result of their peculiar genius, but who instead represented a collectivity—of citizens?—intruding into an economy where there was no imagined space for them?

Occupational data on free people of color in major New England cities before the Civil War is spotty, but available information suggests that between 4 and 14 percent of men of color were engaged in professional or skilled occupations. According to the *African Repository,* of 408 persons of color whose occupations were reported in 1830, 69 percent were either mariners or laborers; another 20 percent were barbers, waiters, and shopkeepers; but the remaining 11 percent worked in twenty-one different skilled or professional occupations.[31] The Committee upon the Condition of the Colored People reported to the 1843 National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo that thirty-five skilled and professional workers among free people of color held total assets of $100,000 in New Bedford.[32] More detailed, statewide estimates of the business assets, occupational characteristics, and employment status of free people of color were made in a report to the Colored National Convention of 1855, held in October in Philadelphia, by the Committee on Mechanical Branches among the Colored People of the Free States. According to this committee, free people of color "in active business" in Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island, and Connecticut had assets worth $2,000,000 in 1855. Further, on the basis of its own occupational census, the committee estimated that there were 448 skilled workers and professionals among free people of color in Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut and that three out of four of these were currently employed in nearly fifty separate skilled professions. (The committee received no returns for Rhode Island and New Hampshire.) Although there is no way of assessing the accuracy of these figures, this information demonstrates that *people of color themselves* believed that 4.5 percent of their adult populations in four New England states were skilled workers or professionals, more than three-quarters of whom were successfully employed.[33]

[31] *African Repository* 13 (March 1837): 90, in Lorenzo J. Greene and Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Wage Earner* (1930; New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), p. 5.

[32] "Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens" (Buffalo, August 1843), pp. 38–39, in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions: 1830–1864,* ed. Howard Holman Bell, (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969). Various national and local conventions were organized by free black leaders during the antebellum period as forums for discussion of issues crucial to improving the "condition"—the social well-being and political status—of free people of color.

[33] I have used the populations of people of color in Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Connecticut as reported in the federal census of 1860 to make this calculation; see Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790–1915* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), table 6, "Negro Population, Slave and Free, at Each Census by Divisions and States:

The federal census of 1850 tabulated statewide occupational data for men of color in Connecticut (alone among New England states). Of a total of 1,973 men of color, employed in a wide range of occupations, nearly three-quarters were listed as either laborers or mariners and almost 10 percent as servants, cooks, or barbers. Nonetheless, over 7 percent were reported to be farmers (and thus presumably independent producers); nearly 2 percent were merchants, ministers, or shopkeepers; skilled craft occupations such as blacksmith, gunsmith, carriagemaker, shoemaker, and ship's carpenter accounted for another 5 percent, and skilled personal services such as tailoring and clerking accounted for nearly 2 percent.[34] The notes accompanying the table sneered that "in Connecticut there are only twenty individuals [of color] engaged in occupations requiring education, or one in one hundred of the whole."[35] Assuming that the number of professionals is correctly reported, however, a more illuminating approach might be to note that 9 percent of adult males of color were professionals or owned their own businesses and farms, and another 5 percent were skilled craftsmen—a visible minority. And even the unskilled employment of the vast majority, involving independently contracted day labor, must have occasioned envy and resentment on the part of increasingly proletarianized working-class whites, subjected to ever more regimented factory work. (The fact that people of color for the most part did not choose to avoid factory work but rather were excluded from most such jobs does not alter the impact of their visible freedom from factory discipline.)

Data from several sources, then, document the presence in New England in the early nineteenth century of a small class of skilled and professional people of color, and a much larger group of men of color who continued to work as unskilled laborers largely outside the encroaching factory system. The 1855 estimates presented to the Colored National Convention demonstrate the consciousness of black leaders that such a class was growing and constituted a potent source of pride, strength, and power among people of color as a whole. Moreover, independent households headed by persons of color suddenly warranted inclusion in city directories: those of Boston in 1828, Providence in 1832, and Hartford in 1843.[36]

Nevertheless, it seems clear that to whites this emerging class represented a disturbing and much-resented element. Just as the earliest awareness of "free people of color" as a category in New England had taken shape during a period of extreme economic dislocation in the 1780s, the class of independent, skilled workers and professionals of color emerged during the economic instability and rapid change of the 1820s, a period that brought hard times to many white families. The rise of manufacturing, spurred by the Embargo and Non-Intercourse Acts and the War of 1812, was moving production out of households and independent shops into factories; the growth of commerce was fostering specialization and depersonalizing the exchange of goods. These changes were transforming preindustrial life for whites by restricting their independence, regimenting their use of time, and altering the nature of work, especially women's work. Whites clearly found the adjustment difficult; at the same time, they could see that many free people of color appeared able either to negotiate the new order successfully or maintain some degree of independence from it. Whites found any degree of success among blacks—any evidence of free people of color *living like white people*—to be as disruptive of the social order as the presence of indigent, dependent, transient, or publicly rowdy ones.

Emancipation enacted its disturbing transformation of a previously fixed and safely stable identity—black/slave—in the larger context of post-Revolutionary instability. The hierarchical social order in the colonial period had always been somewhat more fluid in American than in British practice, yet it remained a constant and reassuring ideal until republican rhetoric and post-Revolutionary economic and political turmoil destabilized it. Ordinary citizens, wondering how Revolutionary social change might affect their previously secure role and status, watched the transformation of slaves into free people of color with its two quite different kinds of consequences, both very visible: a disruptive and dependent poverty on the one hand, an upstart and intrusive prosperity on the other. As part of this transformation, whites also saw a theretofore reliable "marking" system for identifying persons as enslaved or free by their physical characteristics break down and become inoperative. Males of color were becoming free men; could they also become freemen?

Widely held environmental theory explained servile demeanor, condition, and even physical attributes as environmental effects. Comte de Buffon,

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1790–1860," p. 57. I have assumed half of each total population to be "adult," (over nineteen), using age distribution calculations based on table 3, "Negro Population Classified by Sex and Quinquennial Age Periods: 1910 and 1900," p. 164.

[34] J. D. B. DeBow, Superintendent of the United States Census, *Statistical View of the United States, . . . being a Compendium of the Seventh Census; to which are added the resuts of every previous census, beginning with 1790. . . .* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1854), table 70, pp. 80–81.

[35] Ibid., p. 81.

[36] *Directory of Boston, Massachusetts* (Boston: Hunt & Simpson, 1828); *Directory of Providence,*

Rhode Island (Providence: H. H. Brown, 1832); *Geer's Directory of Hartford, Connecticut* (Hartford: Elihu Geer, 1843).

Samuel Stanhope Smith, and others argued that the physical characteristics of Africans were associated with their equatorial origin and would change over time to become more similar to those of the white European.[37] At the same time, antislavery advocates insisted that the negative social and psychological characteristics generally attributed to slaves—lack of mental acuity, laziness, dependency, and so forth—were consequences of enslavement. Persons of color had become slavelike in slavery; emancipation and firm guidance on the part of whites would diminish, if not eradicate, those characteristics over time. Environmental theory promised qualitative transformation as well as physiological adaptation.

Although this argument had reassured white colonists contemplating the possibility of emancipation sometime in the future, it gained troubling implications in the post-Revolutionary climate of anxiety over the uncertain outcome of revolutionary social change. The disassociation of "slave" and "negro" in the course of emancipation also resulted, inevitably, in the wrenching apart of the previously unchallenged correlation "free" and "white," leaving open all possible permutations of the four terms. "White" and "slave," "negro" and "free" emerged, floating and unanchored, available as an explanatory and metaphorical language that had great utility in the unstable post-Revolutionary environment for investigating and describing the disruptive political, social, and perhaps biological consequences of democracy as well as emancipation. People of color served as a kind of case study or reference point, but such investigations implied the possible transformation of whites as well.

Many scholars have noted the heightened interest in issues surrounding people of color in post-Revolutionary America, but most, such as Winthrop Jordan, have viewed this development as a fairly straightforward element of the ongoing debate over the role that blacks and slavery would play in the new republic, itself part of the developing construction of a national identity.[38] David R. Roediger has explored the debasement of black culture as a key element in the formation of post-Revolutionary working-class identity, but he focuses on the distancing of whites from the continuing association with slavery that people of color represented.[39] The link between

northern emancipation and new modes of "racial" discourse has been noted much less frequently.

Shane White, examining the connection between emancipation and racial attitudes in popular media in the middle Atlantic states in the 1780s and 1790s, finds a "curiously disembodied quality" in most of the discussion of the place of blacks in America during this period.[40] One could also argue exactly the opposite position from his evidence: that the almost pornographic portrayal of slaves as commodities and objects of abuse in the magazines and newspapers of elites, on the one hand, and, on the other, sympathetic portrayals of free blacks in rural-oriented almanacs, using distinctive physical and linguistic traits rather than slavery as the source of humor, served to embody, not disembody, the discussion about free people of color. But almanac humor is just a small part of an extensive literature of black/white role reversal that suddenly appeared after 1780. This literature seems clearly linked to whites' interpretation of the emergence of free people of color, whether dependent or successful, as a disruptive factor, somehow not merely symptomatic of but actually engendering the disordering of society, with implications or possibly direct consequences for the role, status, and even "nature" of whites.

Role-reversal literature, constituting a new mode of "racializing" discourse in the early republic, seemed to consist of two distinct but related types whose development overlapped somewhat. The first comprised journalistic, "scientific," and autobiographical accounts, some fictionalized, which explored the literal possibilities of transformation posed by the application of an environmental theory of difference to actually occurring phenomena. Although these accounts diminished in number after 1810, references to them continued to appear in polemical literature on "race" through the 1830s.

The second type explored the appropriation of traditionally white social roles by people of color and involved the ventriloquistic production of fictional persons of color as objects of humor or derision, beginning with the almanac dialogues of the 1780s and 1790s. This fictional genre reached its zenith between 1815 and 1830 with elaborate burlesques in which people of color were ridiculed as inept poseurs imitating the public performances and practices of citizenship in outlandish ways. Just as the journalistic and autobiographical literature responded to actual situations and natural phenomena, the humorous anecdotes and burlesques responded to real events—for example, the establishment of an alternative

[37] George Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Histoire Naturelle*, trans. in *Barr's Buffon: Buffon's Natural History, containing A Theory of the Earth, A General History of Man . . . &c. &c. from the French with Notes by the Translator*, vol. 3 (London: H. D. Symonds, 1797), pp. 324–25, 334–40, 348–52; Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. . . .* , 2d ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: J. Simpson, 1810).

[38] Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 334–35.

[39] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), esp. pp. 43–60.

[40] Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), pp. 61–75.

Independence Day celebration on July 14 by people of color to commemorate the closing of the slave trade. But whereas the journalistic and autobiographical accounts of the 1780s and 1790s tested the mutability of the blackness and whiteness of real, living persons in the face of extreme alterations in their conditions and social roles, the humorous anecdotes and especially the burlesques of the early 1800s treated this question as resolved; in them, blackness and whiteness had become rigid, immutable categories, and the humor lay in placing highly stylized caricatures of free persons of color in citizenship roles to which they were "naturally" unsuited. In other words, in its second phase, role reversal replaced real, diverse people of color with imaginary ones who were predictably, and "naturally," alike. In this respect, the anecdotes and burlesques, although clearly a response to anxiety over the social disorder produced by emancipation and revolution, were also part of a much larger discourse of removal—attempts to realize the promise of Revolutionary antislavery to eliminate "the problem" of slavery (that is, slaves/people of color)—which animated New England in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. (Close examination of the burlesque literature is reserved for the next chapter, which focuses on removal.) In the 1780s and 1790s, though, with mutability questions not yet resolved, much of the early role reversal literature was an attempt to work through and resolve them and, in so doing, to restore order to the Republic.

Two actual situations that engendered extraordinary interest and anxiety in this period and produced extensive literatures of role reversal were the apparent transformation of black skin into white (instances of albinism and vitiglio) and the protracted captivity and enslavement of whites, especially Americans, in the so-called Barbary States of North Africa. These situations suggested that environmental theory might have disturbing implications. If the "markings" of enslaveability were indeed mutable and could disappear gradually in freedom, might the relationship be inverted? Could enslavement transform whites into a servile people, as dependent and instrumental as black slaves? If so, physical characteristics might not be a reliable indicator of "aptitude" for enslavement. Underlying these questions was a profound anxiety over the unmanageability of revolutionary social change; the literature of role reversal posed questions about the "nature" of citizenship in terms of the "nature" of enslaveability and the permanence of its signs.

Many scholars have noted the intense public interest generated in the mid-1790s by the case of Henry Moss, an American-born man of African descent whose dark skin turned white in his early middle age. Ronald Taka-

ki, Shane White, and others have read Moss's case as illuminating whites' concern about the role or "place" of blacks in the new republic. White also has suggested that interest in Moss was part of a broader "curiosity about freaks."[41]

While it is true that the public fascination with physical anomalies embraced "freaks of nature" of all kinds, human and otherwise, it might be useful to place both interests within the larger context of the Enlightenment enthusiasm for classification, observation, and experiment and, more specifically, for analytical physiognomics: seeking systematic correspondences between the external characteristics or markings of living creatures and innate truths about their nature and condition, and classifying them according to the differences perceived. In the preceding half-century a host of scientific discoveries and inventions such as the microscope had altered human perspective and seemed to offer a window on previously inaccessible inner structures of the natural world. American philosophers such as Samuel Stanhope Smith (1787) and leading European naturalists such as Comte de Buffon (1797) attempted detailed ethnographic descriptions of the world's human populations, classified by "races"[42]—fol-

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[41] Ibid., p. 66; Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), pp. 16–35; Benjamin Moss, "Acount of Henry Moss, a White Negro: together with Reflections on the Affection called, by Physiologists, Leucaethiopia humana; Facts and Conjectures relative to the White Colour of Animals, and Observations on the Colour of the Human Species," *Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal* 2 (1806): 3–18. To Takaki, the importance of Moss's case was its role in Rush's diagnosis of blackness as leprosy, and his understanding of both slavery and blackness as contradictions that "sickened" the new republic by undermining its virtue. Takaki used the well-worn demographic argument to distinguish Rush's proposals for isolation and "cure" of blackness from Jefferson's proposals for its removal by means of colonization. Takaki argues that the small numbers of people of color in Rush's North made ultimate assimilation possible, whereas in Jefferson's South only removal was feasible (pp. 49–50). I would argue that Rush's solution must be read as *part* of the broader northern discourse of removal (see Chapter 5).

[42] It is my position that the word "race," both as a colloquial term and in its technical use by eighteenth-century philosophers and naturalists to distinguish one group of humans from another on the basis of perceived physical and cultural differences, was synonymous with "category of human," lacking the ideological content it gained in the course of gradual emancipation. I argue that one consequence of gradual emancipation in the northern United States was an anxiety over the mutability of difference, and that this anxiety was resolved in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth by "naturalizing" difference, locating it within the body and defining it as innate and permanent—in other words, "racializing" it (producing the ideological construct "race"). Like David Roediger (*The Wages of Whiteness*, esp. pp. 43–92), I see this process as motivated by anxiety about the stability of whiteness; unlike him, I locate it not within white workers' struggle to distinguish themselves from southern slaves but rather within their struggle, and that of the emerging white middle class, to stabilize their role as citizen workers in opposition to "dependent and disorderly" ex-slaves emerging as a visible class in their own region.

lowing Linnaeus's 1735 model in *Systema naturae* or a subsequent alternative classification—and then by named groups or tribes.[43]

The very act of classifying human groups or tribes necessarily emphasized differences in cultural practices, clothing, food, environment—and skin color. Buffon, for example, carefully differentiated "very brown" Egyptian women, "very tawny" Moroccans, "brown and tawny" people of the Barbary Coast, "brown, or olive-coloured" Ethiopians, "exceedingly black" Nubians, "very black" Faloffs (peoples to the south of Senegal), and Moors "so tawny that they appear almost black," emphasizing differences in their cultures and small variations in their native climates.[44]

By suggesting that explanations for previously unaccountable variety in human appearance and behavior might lie in the body's response to its environment, science seemed to hold out the possibility of rationalizing revolutionary social change. The permanence of Africans' skin color, at first an evidentiary issue in the scientific and religious controversy over the unity of the human species, seemed to have less abstract implications as well. In the context of gradual emancipation and revolution, the physical transformation of a "negro" into a white person or vice versa, or the birth of one to the other, demanded a scientific explanation that would also constitute a political explanation; these events raised questions about the meaning of both categories and where precisely, or if, identity—black, white, slave, citizen—could be located in an individual human being. They tested environmental explanations of difference against hypothetical inner (or innate) and fixed ones, and they probed the validity of external, physical markers in locating essential human identity. Moss's was only one of more than a dozen cases of anomalies of skin color that were publicized and discussed between 1788 and 1810 in an attempt to explore and resolve these questions. While some of these individuals were exhibited, or exhibited themselves, as marvels (see Figure 1), their definitive categorization as freaks—as opposed to products of systematic transformations that could be explained and reliably replicated—represented a conclusion reached after more than two decades of scientific and philosophical debate, a conclusion that served political imperatives at least as much as it satisfied scientific ones.

Henry Moss was not the first "Negro" or "African" to achieve fame for being or becoming white. Among earlier accounts the best known may be Jefferson's description in 1781 of "a negro man within my own knowledge,

[43] On the genealogy of scientific arguments over the origin and nature of diversity of "races," see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[44] Buffon, *Barr's Buffon*, pp. 250, 254, 280, 272.

A Child born at Gros Islet, in the Island of St LUCIA, of Black Parents.

Taken from a Model of the Infant, coloured from nature, in the Museum, Gracechurch Street.

T. Pole, Surgeon, Gracechurch Street. London. Printed & Sold at N.º 33 Gracechurch Street.

PRIMROSE.

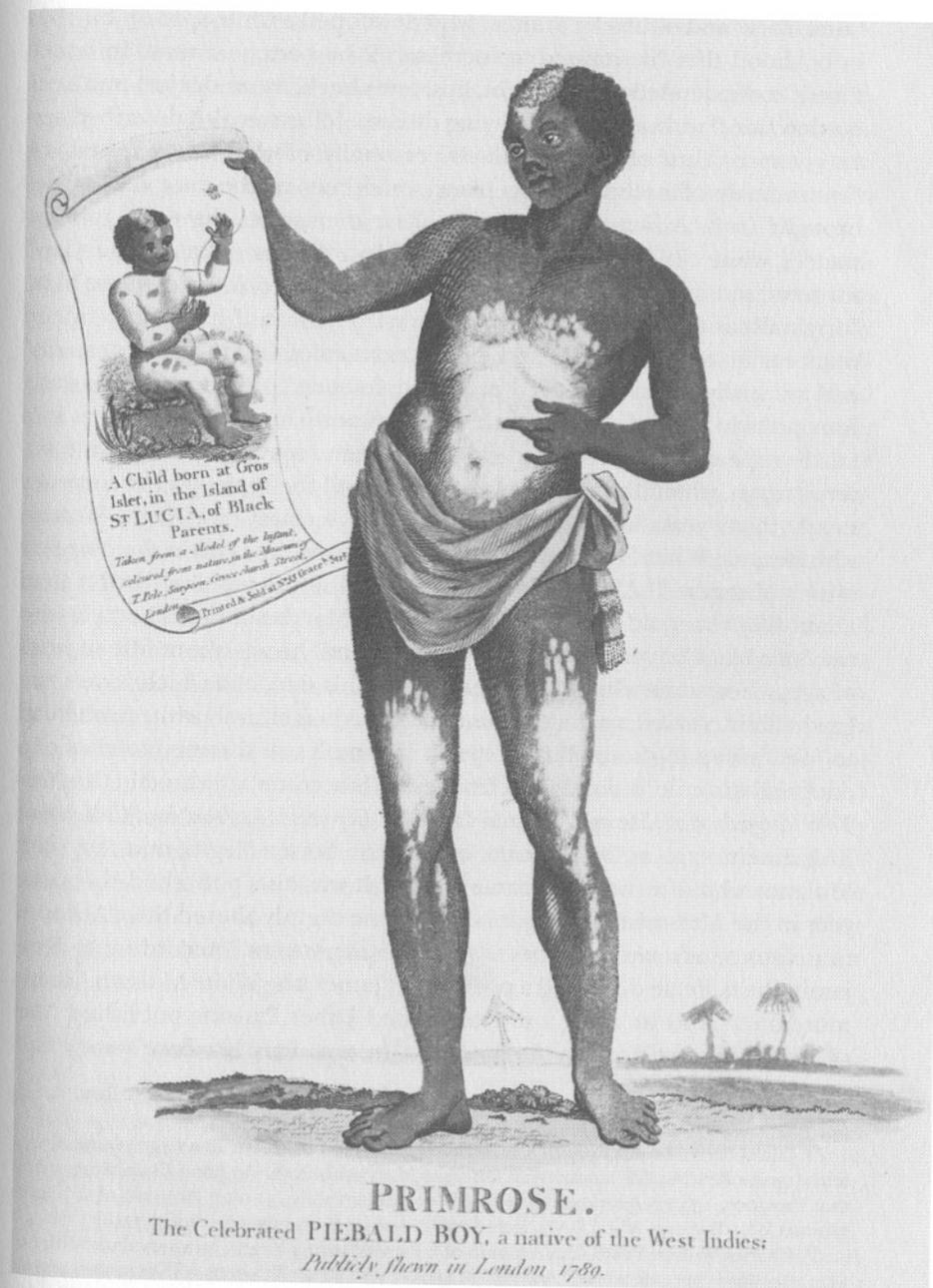The Celebrated PIEBALD BOY, a native of the West Indies; Publicly shewn in London 1789.

Figure 1. *Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia*

born black, and of black parents," who developed a white spot on his chin in boyhood that "continued to increase till he became a man, by which time it had extended over his chin, lips, one cheek, the under jaw, and neck on that side," without accompanying disease. Jefferson also described seven instances, four of which he knew personally, of what he suggested was "an anomaly of nature, taking place sometimes in the race of negroes brought from Africa, who, though black themselves, have, in rare instances, white children, called Albinos."[45] In 1788 James Bate, a Maryland surgeon, published an account of a forty-year-old cook-maid whose skin, "originally as dark as that of the most swarthy Africans," had begun fifteen years earlier to turn white "in the parts next adjoining to the fingernails" and gradually became white "over the whole body. . . . In her present state, four parts in five, of the skin, are white, smooth, and transparent, as in a fair European." This story had originally been recounted in a private letter in 1759, which the recipient had held until the topic gained currency nearly thirty years later. A shorter version, "Account of a Negro-Woman who Became White," was published, unattributed, in 1796 in the *New York Weekly Magazine*.[46] Also, in 1788 Charles Willson Peale described a man about fifty years old named James, born in Maryland around 1741, who was "of a black or very dark mulatto colour until he was about fifteen years of age, when some white spots appeared on his skin, and which have since gradually increased; so that, at this time, his skin is entirely white from head to foot, excepting some brown specks like moles, and some blotches of a dark mulatto colour on his cheekbones." His account appeared in the *New-York Magazine; or Literary Repository* and the *Universal Asylum, and Columbian Magazine* in 1791 as "An Account of a Person born a Negro, or a very dark Mulatto, who afterwards became white." It was also published the same year in the *Massachusetts Magazine* under the slightly altered title "Account of a NEGRO, or a very dark MULATTO, turning WHITE." According to Benjamin Rush, Peale displayed a portrait of "James, the White Mulatto," in his museum.[47] And in 1789 a doctor named James Parsons published "Account of a white negro" in the *American Museum*. This, like Bate's story, had

been written much earlier, in 1765, and only published more than two decades later when the subject had become newsworthy.[48]

Thus, the issues of "Negroes turning white" and "white Negroes" had already received considerable public attention when Henry Moss became a celebrity around 1796. His case achieved greater notoriety than many others at least in part because Henry apparently had a considerable talent for public relations; one physician, Charles Caldwell, reported that "Moss procured a comfortable subsistence by exhibiting himself as a show."[49] Caldwell and Benjamin Rush both examined Moss in Philadelphia sometime in 1796. Rush featured him in a paper on the causes of skin color in "Negroes," read before the American Philosophical Society in 1797 and published in the society's *Transactions* in 1799.[50] Caldwell apparently discussed his examination of Moss widely among colleagues, notably Benjamin Smith Barton, professor of botany and natural history at the University of Pennsylvania, but failed to publish his conclusions until 1855, when he discussed Moss at length in two different sections of his autobiography and bitterly accused Barton of stealing his ideas.[51] In 1798 a writer signing himself "D.W." published a lengthy account of Moss in the *Weekly Magazine* entitled, "Account of a singular change of color in a negro." Moss visited Rhode Island antislavery activist Moses Brown in 1803, who also conducted a careful physical examination before writing a letter certifying Moss's condition as "an evidence of the sameness of human nature," he being "a man who appears to our senses, both black and white."[52] In 1806, Rush as editor of the *Philadelphia Medical Medical and Physical Journal* published a very long and detailed article about "Henry Moss, a White Negro."[53] By 1810, Samuel Stanhope Smith's much-expanded second edition of his *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* could cite Henry Moss, without introduction or elaboration, as the obvious proof of Smith's contention that "difference of color does not demonstrate diversity of origin."[54]

[45] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781; New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 70–71.

[46] James Bate, "An Account of a remarkable alteration of colour in a negro woman: in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Alexander Williamson of Maryland, from Mr. James Bate, Surgeon in that Province, 1759," *American Museum* 4 (December 1788): 501–2; "Account of a Negro-Woman Who Became White," *New York Weekly Magazine* 2 (August 31, 1796): 71.

[47] Charles Willson Peale, "An Account of a Person born a Negro, or a very dark Mulatto, who afterwards became white," *New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository* 2 (November 1791): 634–35, and *Universal Asylum, and Columbian Magazine* 7 (December 1791): 409–10; Charles Willson Peale, "Account of a NEGRO, or a very dark MULATTO, turning WHITE," *Massachusetts Magazine* 3 (December 1791) 744; Rush, "Account of Henry Moss," 7.

[48] James Parsons, M.D., "Account of a white negro," *American Museum* 5 (March 1789): 234.

[49] Charles Caldwell, *Autobiography of Charles Caldwell, M.D., with a Preface, Notes, and Appendix by Marriot W. Warner* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, 1855), p. 269.

[50] Benjamin Rush, "Observations intended to favour a suposition that the black Color (as it is called) of the Negroes is derived from the LEPROSY. Read at a Special Meeting July 14, 1797," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 4 (1799): 289–97.

[51] Caldwell, *Autobiography*, pp. 163–64, 268–69.

[52] D.W., "Account of a singular change of color in a negro," *Weekly Magazine* 1 (February 24, 1798): 109–11; Moses Brown, "To all whom it may concern," 1803, Moses Brown Papers (Antislavery File), Rhode Island Historical Society.

[53] Rush, "Account of Henry Moss."

[54] Smith, *Essay* p. 52.

In the meantime, public interest in Henry Moss generated stories of similar cases in the popular literature and also produced lay contributions to medical periodicals. In October 1800, for example, the *Monthly Magazine and American Review* picked up an article published earlier in the year by the *Medical Repository*: "Another instance of a Negro Turning White" was the story of one Maurice whose "sable cloud is plainly disappearing on his shoulder."[55] A year later the *Medical Repository,* under the headline "ANOTHER ETHIOPIAN TURNING TO A WHITE MAN," published a letter to the editors from a Mr. A. Catlin of Lichfield, Connecticut, who reported proliferating and enlarging white spots on "Pompey, a very healthy negro," and evinced "the fullest belief that a very few years will complete the total change."[56] IN 1809, an *American Magazine of Wonders* article largely recapitulated Jefferson's litany of known African albinos but included an additional case of "a female of this kind born of black parents, married to an Englishman, whose children were mulattoes. The woman was exhibited as a show, but her children were the greatest curiosities" (presumably because both parents appeared to be entirely white).[57]

Interest in Moss's case and others coincided with the gradual emancipation process, peaking in the 1790s and dissipating by 1810. Such intense interest reflected whites' anxiety about the stability of their own as well as blacks' emerging role as citizens in a rapidly changing political and social environment. Although these accounts posed the possibility of radical metamorphosis, their language ultimately served to reassure white readers that even seemingly extreme types of transformation of human identity could be understood, controlled, placed within the limits of science, and, finally, revealed to be superficial rather than essential. By emphasizing the authenticity of the transformed person's original blackness, the accounts secured a permanent association of a visibly altered individual with her or his "real" identity as a "negro."[58] Several accounts certified Henry Moss's original blackness. Joseph Holt, who had enlisted with Moss in the Continental Army, stated in writing that "from the first of my acquaintance with him, till within two or three years past, he was of as dark a complexion as any African.[59] In his letter, "To all whom it may concern," an authenticating document relying on its author's reputation, Moses Brown noted, "He

needs no cirtificate that he has been a black man."[60] Buffon, too, confirmed two "white negroes" on his own reputation, noting that "one of the two I saw myself."[61]

These accounts sought to map the location of difference deep within the body, where heredity alone rather than skin color could provide a valid marker for it. Not a single account refers to a "loss of former color in a white woman" but rather to an "alteration of color in a negro woman"; never to "negroid whites" but always to "white negroes"—even though several of the subjects came to public attention after they had become, or were born, entirely white. In this way, these reports distinguished between appearance and essence: these individuals were certified to be substantially "negroes" and only accidentally "white."

The metaphor of mapping is extraordinarily apt in these disturbingly detached explorations of living human bodies, which rendered the contours of the subjects literal objects of study. James Bate's original account of his examination (made in 1759 but published in 1788) of a forty-year-old female cook included his observation that "her head, face, and breast, with the belly, legs, calves, and thighs, are almost wholly white, the *pudenda . . . ,* party coloured" (subsequent reprintings left this section out). Bate also reported trying to raise a blister on her skin, without success.[62] Bate was a surgeon, but Moses Brown, a Quaker businessman, reported an even more intrusive examination of Henry Moss in 1803: "His back below his shoulders is mostly as white as white people of his age, as are parts of his breast and even his nipples. The white parts of his skin and especially his anus are so transparent as to show the vains [*sic*] as distinct, as a white mans." Moss told Brown that he had also "been examined and viewed by President Washington, Secy Jefferson, Docr Rush &c," whether with a similar thoroughness in the first two cases one can only wonder. According to Moss's memory of the third examination, Brown reported, "the Docr apprehending he could cause his [Moss's] skin to change, he blistered him &c, but to no purpose, the black skin whereon they were put returned, til the Doc gave up further experiment."[63] Although "D.W." apparently observed some decorum when he examined Moss (with women present), noting that "the whole of his breast, arms, and legs, so far as it was decent to expose them to a mixed company, were of a clear European complexion," his propriety did not keep him from poking at his subject: "Upon pressing his skin

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[55] "Another Instance of a Negro Turning White," *Monthly Magazine and American Review* 3 (October 1800): 391–92; *Medical Repository* 3 (1800): 199–200.

[56] A. Catlin, "ANOTHER ETHIOPIAN TURNING TO A WHITE MAN," *Medical Repository* 5 (1801): 83–84.

[57] *American Magazine of Wonders* 1 (1809): 220.

[58] In this respect, these accounts resemble slave narratives in which testimonials from whites legitimate the writers' "real" identity as former slaves.

[59] D.W., "Account of a singular change," p. 109.

[60] Brown, "To all whom it may concern."

[61] Buffon, *Barr's Buffon,* p. 324.

[62] Bate, "Account of a remarkable alteration of colour," p. 501; for shorter version, see, e.g., *New York Weekly Magazine* 2 (August 31, 1796): 71.

[63] Brown, "To all whom it may concern."

with a finger, the part pressed appeared white; and on removal of the pressure, the displaced blood rushed back, suffusing the part with red, exactly as in the case of an European, in like circumstances."[64] The very nature and matter-of-fact reporting of these examinations confirms the examiners' view of the intrinsic chattel nature of the subjects, despite the fact that not one was described as a slave. Some of them, including the two subjects of letters written at least twenty years before they were published, may have been slaves in fact; but it was their whiteness, not their status, that generated interest in the age of emancipation. Henry Moss, the most widely discussed, was in fact born a free man.[65] Nonetheless, the discursive exploration of the limits of transformation was ultimately essentializing.

A few commentators did see the interesting implications of these cases for the continuation of southern slavery, especially since enslaveability still rested on the marker of skin color in the South. Noting first the importance to the zoologist of cases like that of "Maurice," the unnamed writer of "Another Instance of a Negro Turning White" in 1800 ended with this comment: "How additionally singular would it be, if instances of the spontaneous disappearance of this sable mark of distinction between slaves and their masters were to become frequent! They would then be no less important to the moralist and political economist."[66] D.W., too, saw the antislavery implications of Henry Moss's case, carrying the analysis a step farther:

> Such is the history . . . of the change of a negro to a white man—a change, which, had Henry Moss happened to have been a slave, would have furnished an irrefragable argument for annihilating his owner's claim. Now as . . . a black colour so clearly authorises the extreme degradation of a considerable portion of the human race; and as the change from white to black must be admitted as equally possible with the reverse above stated, it may be well for the white slave dealers, and their fair abettors . . . to consider how far they may be personally interested in perpetuating such a criterion; as by it, they may ultimately be doomed.[67]

One commentator read the "negro turning white" phenomenon as the vanguard of a wholesale transformation to white of all people of color in

[64] D.W., "Account of a singular change," pp. 110–11.
[65] Stanton (*The Leopard's Spots*, p. 6), claims that Moss was born a slave in Virginia; however, both Joseph Holt's certification of 1798 (in D.W., "Account of a singular change," p. 109) and Rush's 1806 "Account of Henry Moss," p. 5,—detailed accounts that agree with each other—state that Moss was born free in Virginia.
[66] "Another Instance of a Negro Turning White" (*Medical Repository*), p. 200.
[67] D.W., "Account of a singular change," p. 111.

the hospitable American environment. Samuel Stanhope Smith concluded in 1810:

> It is evident to every eye capable of comparing an American, with an African negro, that the change of climate, and of their manner of subsistence, has already produced in the posterity of the Africans, all the alteration in their appearance which, in so short a period of time, could justly be expected. . . . I do not hesitate to apply this remark to the American slaves, in general; but is applicable especially to the domestic slaves of opulent families in the southern states, and the free blacks who are found in considerable numbers in the northern portion of the union. . . . I repeat, and I repeat it with the most perfect confidence, because the fact is open to the observation of every American, that, in the United States, the physiognomy, and the whole figure and personal appearance of the African race is undergoing a favorable change.[68]

Smith proposed a hierarchy of transformation in which the entire population of free northern blacks stood poised on the brink of becoming white, proof positive of the efficacy of the environmental theory of human difference. But his analysis was distinctly out of step with the growing conviction of many more northerners that the differences distinguishing free people of color from whites could not be located in superficial, and mutable, skin color, any more than they could be located in the assimilable religious and cultural differences that had seemed to distinguish Africans from Europeans in the early years of British colonial slavery. Skin color was only a sign—a variable, unreliable sign—of innate and permanent difference.

The last articles on albinism and vitiglio in persons of color appeared in the *Medical Museum* and the *American Magazine of Wonders,* two magazines devoted largely to sensational stories about freaks and curiosities. The concluding paragraph of one article asserted, "These facts fully ascertain, that this [albinism] is a variety only of the Negro race."[69] By 1835 J. Jacobus Flournoy, in his effort "properly to expose the true nature of the blacks, and to disabuse our countrymen of a partiality to them, *free* or *bondmen*,"

[68] Smith, *Essay,* pp. 152, 155. George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 72–73, and Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots*, pp. 3–14, discuss Smith's ideas.
[69] See, e.g., "Account of two Albinos," *Medical Museum* 2 (1806): 284–86; "Account of a Negro Woman Who Became White, *American Magazine of Wonders* 2 (1809): 312–13; "A Curious Account of the Albino Negro," *American Magazine of Wonders,* 1 (1809): 218–20 (quotation, p. 220).

could dismiss out of hand Samuel Stanhope Smith's assertions about "the gradual change from black to white in certain negroes," insisting confidently, "May it not have been that nature sometimes plays pranks on the grown person as well as the foetus in the womb; that the sudden circular whiteness in a negro is such a freak; and entirely disconnected with the long link of millions accounted for in the Bible—made black as suddenly, to discriminate the once fallen from the twice fallen—the white man from the negro?"[70]

Transformations of skin color could, of course, occur in either direction. D.W. was probably not the only person who thought the real significance of the Moss case lay in the implications of the mutability of color for the enslaveability of whites.[71] Although Buffon might insist that abrupt change in color or an anomalous birth coloration such as albinism "never happens but from black to white," his environmental theory of diversity and long-term change convinced him that "many ages might perhaps elapse before a white race would become altogether black; but there is a probability that in time a white people, transported from the north to the equator, would experience that change, especially if they were to change their manners, and to feed solely on the productions of the warm climate."[72] Under radically different conditions, enslaved in a tropical climate by a "savage" people of color, could free white Americans become . . . something else? Slaves? And how profound and permanent would such a change be? Was whiteness part of some stable, essential nature, or did the conditions of their existence have the power to transform the "nature" of Americans and Europeans too, as Buffon and Smith suggested?

An ongoing diplomatic crisis that coincided with the peak of the emancipation period posed these questions, and the enormous popularity of the literature it generated suggests that many Americans found the questions compelling and looked to this literature for answers. The crisis involved the enslavement of white Americans by an African people of color. Beginning in 1785 the so-called Barbary States of North Africa (Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli)—mounted a persistent threat to United States commerce in the Mediterranean—which before the Revolution had represented as much as one-sixth of the American colonies' exports of wheat and flour and one-quarter of their exports of preserved fish and rice—by preying on American shipping.[73] The Americans negotiated a series of treaties with each of the Barbary States, trying to accommodate or finesse escalating demands for tribute, often in the form of naval stores, arms, and jewels. Disruption or delay of payment, or efforts to renegotiate terms more favorable to the United States, resulted in the periodic seizure of American vessels by Barbary corsairs—especially those of Algiers—and the capture and imprisonment of the American crew members, many of whom spent eight or more years in captivity before negotiation and payment of ransom effected their release.

Between 1785 and 1795 thirteen American ships were seized by the Algerines, and about 130 crewmen were captured; a treaty with Algiers approved by Congress in 1795 ransomed the 85 American prisoners who remained alive.[74] Eight years later another 307 American crewmen were captured off the coast of Tripoli, two years after a formal declaration of war by Tripoli on the United States. When the war ended after a U.S. naval victory in 1805, 297 of the 302 surviving crewmen were ransomed (the remaining five had adopted Islam and elected to remain in Tripoli). During the same period a number of American ships, and vessels of foreign registration carrying American citizens, foundered on the North African littoral, and their crews and passengers were also imprisoned in Barbary.[75]

The common term for this captivity of Americans (and other Europeans as well: in 1786 there were at least 2,200 foreigners imprisoned in Al-

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[70] Flournoy, "*Essay on the Origin, Habits, Etc. of the African Race*, pp. 3, 13, 15.

[71] D.W., "Account of a singular change," p. 111.

[72] Buffon, *Barr's Buffon*, pp. 324, 306.

[73] The most recent monograph on U.S. relations with the Barbary States is Robert S. Al-

lison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776–1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Allison focuses on ideological aspects of the war with Tripoli; he explores the meaning for Americans of the victory of the United States, as a Christian and free nation, over an Islamic one seen as mired in sexual, religious, and political despotism. See his chap. 4 for the connections Americans made between U.S. and Algerian slavery. Michael L. S. Kitzen's *Tripoli and the United States at War: A History of American Relations with the Barbary States, 1785–1805* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1993), pp. 10–11, is a straightforward diplomatic history, offering little analysis of popular American perspectives on the captivity of American seamen or insight into the effects of cultural or "racial" factors. Earlier though relatively infrequent antecedents of the crisis in U.S.-Barbary relations dated back to the 1690s; e.g., in 1693 Benjamin Fletcher, governor of New York, solicited contributions to redeem New York City sailors from slavery in Morocco (Broadside Collection, American Antiquarian Society).

[74] The eleven American vessels captured by the Algerines in October and November 1793 are listed in *Naval Documents Related to the United States' Wars with the Barbary Powers*, vol. 1, *Naval Operations including Diplomatic Background from 1785 through 1801* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Navy, Office of Naval Records and Library, 1939), p. 56, giving the number of men captured as 105. The same list, as recorded in *A Journal, of the Captivity and Suffering of John Foss; Several Years a Prisoner at Algiers*, 2d ed. (Newburyport, Mass.: Angier March, n.d.), gives the number captured as 109, plus 21 from two earlier seizures of July 1785; it also lists 35 crewmen as having died but does not make clear whether they were killed in the encounter with the Algerines or died early in captivity. See Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States*, pp. 19–21.

[75] Kitze, *Tripoli and the United States*, pp. 96, 166.

giers)[76] was "slavery." This was not a hyperbolic or allusive term. Captured Europeans and Americans were sold in slave markets; they were forced to perform heavy physical labor and to beg monies from their friends and families abroad to provide anything above the barest subsistence level of food and clothing; they were regularly beaten and chained for the slightest infractions; and, because their eventual ransom was uncertain at best, unless they converted to Islam they could expect only death to liberate them from bondage. A letter to a U.S. State Department official from Samuel Calder, former captain of the American schooner *Jay* out of Gloucester, Massachusetts, described the treatment he and his crew received following their capture in October 1793:

> On our landing we were all put into Chains without the least distinction and put to hard labor from daylight until night with only the allowance of two small black loaves and Water & close confined at night. . . . we think ourselves happy if we escape through the day being beat by our driver, who carries a stick big enough to Knock a man down. . . . we have no Reason but to expect but that the Plague will in the course of a year take off many of us, as the last Plague took away 800 out of 2000 Slaves. . . . I would if it was in my power forward you a regular Protest, but you know its impossible in this Country & I suppose one from a Slave would be of no importance.[77]

The American public was deeply concerned with the fate of the American slaves in Algiers, a concern extending beyond prayers and editorial letters to raising subscriptions in Boston and Norfolk for relief of the captives. The later, and shorter, Tripolitan captivity also aroused international interest and support for the crew of the captured *Philadelphia*.[78] But what really seemed to seize the popular imagination were the personal narratives of the captivity experience and literary simulations of such narratives—some in poetic and dramatic form—which appeared between 1794 and 1820, many reprinted five and six times.

The narratives of the Algerine captivity share some characteristics with those of the captivities of whites by Native American peoples, and their popularity undoubtedly stemmed from some of the same fascinations. Both depended for their appeal on the terror of sudden loss of aegis, es-

trangement from everything familiar, and submission to the seemingly irrational whim of people distinguished from the captive by alien appearance, religion, and culture; both became increasingly stylized and sexualized around 1800. In addition, the characterizations of Arabs, Moors, and Algerines in the one genre and American natives in the other drew upon strikingly similar imagery. June Namias notes what she terms "the overtly racist and bloodthirsty" character of American captivity narratives in the Revolutionary and early republican era, which suggests that one element of their project, like that of the Algerine narratives, may have been to test environmental theory (here, limited to the effects of alien cultural practices) and the stability of whiteness.[79]

Nonetheless, there were telling differences. Whites captured by Native American were called "prisoners" or "captives," never "slaves," even when the work their captors demanded formed a significant part of their narratives. Conversely, the imprisonment of Americans in Barbary was always termed "slavery." White Americans' captivity in a continent that had been, and continued to be, the source of America's own slave labor offered a context so rich in irony that the reversal of roles simply could not be ignored. Nearly all the Algerine narratives include a detailed description of the geography, climate, and history of North Africa and the customs of its various peoples—elements absent from the narratives of white captives of American natives. Captivity on American soil reduced the potency of the transforming effect of imprisonment, since environmental theories emphasized climate as the factor most productive of variety in humans. Native American tribes were perceived in static rather than historical terms, for no written history of their migration, change, or encounters with Europeans, Arabs, or other literate peoples could be referenced. They could also be seen as relatively "pure" (partly because Americans collapsed tribal distinctions into the all-encompassing term "Indian"), whereas written histories of North African peoples recognized the intermixing that had resulted from migration and conquest and minutely catalogued the multitude of mixed and "degraded" peoples of color that had resulted.

Since the 1780s, white Americans had become familiar with ethnographic descriptions of the peoples of North Africa that clearly depicted them as people of color. Although North Africans' allegiance to Islam represented another element of difference, "heathenism" had receded in importance since sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europeans encountering Africans and North American natives had regarded it as a critically

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[76] The Algerines also attacked the merchant shipping of Russians, Spaniards, Neapolitans, and others (ibid., p. 13).

[77] Letter to David Pearce Jr. from Samuel Calder, Slave, Algiers, December 4, 1793, *Naval Documents*, pp. 57–58.

[78] Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States*, pp. 18, 102–4.

[79] June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 23, 24.

important, if not defining, difference.[80] Late eighteenth-century philosophers counted colors, not saints. Buffon cited an earlier observer, who had declared that "the sea coast people of Barbary are brown and tawny"; that Capex, a city in Tunis, was populated by "poor people exceedingly black" and that those in the kingdom of Morocco "are very tawny."[81] Smith described north Africans as an elaborate melange of colors:

> In passing above the river Senegal we enter on a lighter shade of the negro colour; after which, as we advance towards the North, and before we arrive at the kingdom of Morocco, we find the darkest copper of the Moorish complexion. But all this tract is filled with various tribes of wandering Moors and Arabs, and often with a mixed breed, the offspring of unions formed between these, and the native blacks, among whom the negro complexion predominates; but their features bear a greater resemblance to those of the Moors, and make some approach to the European face.[82]

The "savagery" of North Africans was also emphasized. Buffon observed the "state of lawless independence" of the Arabs of North Africa, Persia, Turkey, and Arabia and their tendency to "glory in their vices."[83] Again, savagery was now evaluated in terms of personal and social practices, in contrast to the seventeenth-century association of savagery with paganism.

The people of Algiers were not, then, "negroes," but were characterized as "savage," "lawless," and "tawny"—language quite similar to that used to describe the native peoples of North America. "Savages will always be discoloured, even in temperate climates, by different shades of the tawny complexion," said Smith in a section on American natives that directly followed the one on Africans.[84] He believed that the coloration of both North Africans and Native Americans supported his contention that "manners" (degree of civilization) and climate and food jointly produce human variety.

Thus, when personal stories of enslavement by "tawny" Arabs and "dusky" or "swarthy" Moors of unbridled savagery began to surface in the United States, Americans were prepared to read these stories as tests of the durability of republican whiteness, much as an earlier generation had read narratives of the captivity of colonists by native peoples as tests of the durability of Christian faith. The experiences of slavery in Algiers and Tripoli thus represented tests of the ability of free white Americans to resist being degraded to the moral, cultural, and even physical level of the people who enslaved them. In other words, the Algerine captivity provided an environment in which enslavement might in fact transform white Americans into slavelike persons, as instrumental and dependent as black slaves. This potential mutability of whites into slaves/people of color in Africa offered as great a symbolic challenge to the American social order as the actual mutability of blacks into freemen/whites at home; both could be read symptomatically to evaluate the potential political, social, and perhaps biological consequences of democracy and emancipation.[85]

American interest in ethnography encouraged nearly every narrator of Algerine captivity to include a classification of the Barbary inhabitants. They described them variously as mixtures of several different peoples— Moors or Morescos, Levantines, Turks, Cologlies, Arabs—although the proportions and identifications differ from account to account. Virtually every writer on the subject attempted to describe the precise colors of the North Africans. Robert White, enslaved for four years and nine months in Algiers, referred to them as having "a black, swarthy complexion"; Mathew Carey, too, called them "swarthy." But a Mr. Brooks, a former captive, reported to James W. Stevens that the inhabitants of the Barbary Coast exhibited a "pretty fair complexion"; only those in the interior, particularly the Arabs, were "swarthy." Robert Adams, three years a slave, described the Moors as "straight haired but quite black," the Arabs as "a deep but bright brunette, essentially unlike the sallow tinge of the mulattoes," and the "Arabs of the Desert" as "more or less swarthy according to their proximity to the Negro states." John Foss, enslaved for four years and one month, found the Turks "not unlike Americans" in complexion, the Cologlies "more tawny," and the Arabs "of a much darker complexion than the

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[80] See Jordan, *White over Black*, pp. 20–24, 92–94. Allison (*Crescent Obscured*) emphasizes religious factors in Americans' distaste for and fear of the inhabitants of Tripoli, Algiers, and Tunis and discusses the view of Islam not only as a false and dangerous belief but also as a source of political tyranny (pp. 35–59). He does not really explore European and American representation of Muslims as peoples of color, however, although he does note the "color line" between white and black captives as a factor both in their treatment by Arab captors and their solidarity as prisoners (pp. 121–26).

[81] Buffon, *Barr's Buffon*, p. 254.

[82] Smith, *Essay*, pp. 136–37.

[83] Buffon, *Barr's Buffon*, p. 246.

[84] Smith, *Essay*, p. 140.

[85] Allison reads the ideological import of the Algerine captivity narratives quite differently, regarding them as significant and popular because they presented an analogy between American slavery and Islamic tyranny that forced Americans to confront slavery as the potential worm in the apple of their political liberty (*Crescent Obscured*, pp. 87–106). He sees the imprisonment of Americans in the Barbary States as presenting a test of the character of Americans in the face of severe restrictions on their liberty; absent a "racial" dimension, however, he does not see implications for the nature of citizenship and its qualifications for American whites (Chap. 5, esp. p. 126).

Moors, being darker than the Mulattoes." To Maria Martin and Lucinda Martin, six years enslaved, all the Algerines were "tawny" or "very tawny."[86]

Most accounts also emphasized the savagery and inhumanity of the Algerines. Nearly every account included graphic descriptions of punishments meted out to white slaves, including being bastinadoed, burned, roasted alive, impaled, and cast over the walls to catch and dangle for days on iron hooks. [87]

The sexual practices and moral character of the Algerines were deplored as particularly degraded.[88] To John Foss they were "cursed with all the vices of mankind"; Foss's and James Stevens's narratives stated in identical language that the Algerines had adopted "the very worst parts of the Mahometan Religion," which "countenances all their vices."[89] Some of the narratives described the sexual exploitation of small Christian boys in relatively explicit terms. John Burnham told the *Rural Magazine* that the Dey (governor) would always review newly captured "boys or good-looking young men," of whom he would select "such as he pleases for his own do-

mestics, and they remain always in his house"; he said that "the Dey hath always a particular boy, one of the fairest among the number, for attending in his bed-chamber, with whom, it is said, he is guilty of the most horrid of all crimes." James Stevens generalized the practice to all the Barbary elite: "Sodomy is so extremely fashionable among them, and so little are they disposed to keep this foible a secret, that it is the subject of their most plaintive songs, and they will spare no pains in procuring the gratification of their infamous love."[90]

Many narratives equated the Algerines with animals or used animalistic descriptive terms. Robert White described them as "those *Beings,* who have only the shape and appearance of the human race"; they "fell on us like ravenous wolves," he wrote, and their stronghold was a "nest of vermin." Mathew Carey said it was their custom that "the family and domestic animals, lie promiscuously in the tents together."[91]

The reports of cruel, depraved, and bestial behavior raised serious questions for American readers: would enslavement by such people degrade white American freemen to a similar level? John Burnham, commander of the ship *Hope,* taken in 1793, wrote of the housing conditions of the slaves that "in many places of the building are Christians, monkeys, apes, and asses altogether." Reduction to the condition of animals was, after all, only a metaphor, but it was the central metaphor of slavery: systematic eradication of personhood, debasement to the status of chattel. The Algerines commonly called their white slaves "dogs," Stevens reported.[92]

James Stevens said that each public slave was forced to wear an iron ring around one ankle "as evidence of his belonging to the public," while private slaves sold into the country must carry burdens to market, work naked in the fields, tend cattle, drag ploughs, and "do all other kinds of the most servile drudgery." John Burnham reported forced work at trades such as sailmaking, carpentry, and smithing, along with periodic labor hauling rocks from the mountains to the "mole," or breakwater, protecting the harbor of Algiers. He was forced to carry "a burden of at least 250 weight" and, after falling under it, had to be carried to the hospital. Yet his rations were only "three small black loaves a day." John Foss wore a "25–30 pound chain from leg to shoulder," performed forced labor on the mole, and summed up his experience in verse: "Slavery, more abject than the mind can

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[86] Robert White, "A Curious, Historical and Entertaining Narrative of the Captivity and almost unheard-of Sufferings and cruel Treatment of Mr. Robert White, Mariner," in *Bickerstaff's Boston Almanack, or Federal Calendar for 1791* (Boston: Bickerstaff, 1790); Mathew Carey, *A Short Account of Algiers, containing a Description of the Climate of that Country, of the Manners and Customs of the inhabitants. . . .*(Philadelphia: J. Parker, 1794), p. 2; James W. Stevens, *An Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers; Comprehending a Novel and Interesting Detail of Events Relative to the American Captives* (Philadelphia: Hogan & M'Elroy, 1797), p. 143; Robert Adams, *The Narrative of Robert Adams, An American Sailor, who was Wrecked on the Western Coast of Africa in the year 1810; was Detailed Three Years in Slavery by the Arabs of the Great Desert. . . .* (Boston: Wells & Lilly, 1817), pp. 31, 186; John Foss, *The Algerine Slaves: A Poem, by a Citizen of Newburyport* [with] "A Journal, of the Captivity and Suffering of John Foss; Several years a Prisoner at Algiers; Together with . . . Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Algerines," 2d ed. (Newburyport, Mass.: Angier March, 1798), p. 74; Maria Martin, *History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, who was six years a slave in Algiers: . . . To which is Annexed, A History of Algiers, a Description of the Country, the Manners and Customs of the Natives. . . .* (Boston: W. Crary , 1806), p. 27; Lucinda Martin, *History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Lucinda Martin, who was six years a slave in Algiers. . . .*(Boston: Lemuel Austin, 1810), p. 43. The American Antiquarian Society catalogue lists Lucinda's as a second edition of Maria's, and in fact the historical material (pp. 4–38), is identical, as are the details of imprisonment in a small apartment in an old castle (pp. 61–65); but the rest is completely different. Parts of the later narrative are obviously "borrowed" from the earlier one; similarly, the historical accounts of both are "borrowed" in substantial part from Stevens. The Carey and Stevens accounts are quite similar on some points as well, especially in their descriptions of punishments carried out in Algiers; either these matters were singularly memorable to all observers, or both writers borrowed liberally from earlier sources.

[87] Stevens, *Historical and Geographical Account,* pp. 161–64; Carey, *Short Account of Algiers,* pp. 16–17.

[88] In chap. 3 of *Crescent Obscured,* "A Peek Into the Seraglio: Americans, Sex, and the Muslim World" (pp. 61–85), Allison discusses at length the portrayal of Muslim sexuality as tyrannous and debased.

[89] Foss, *The Algerine Slaves,* pp. 64, 66; Stevens, *Historical and Geographical Account,* p. 164.

[90] John Burnham, "The Curses of Slavery: Treatment of the American Prisoners at Algiers," *Rural Magazine; or, Vermont Repository,* March 1795. Stevens, *Historical and Geographical Account,* p. 216.

[91] White, "A Curious, Historical and Entertaining Narrative"; Carey, *Short Account of Algiers,* p. 11.

[92] Burnham, "The Curses of Slavery"; Stevens, *Historical and Geographical Account,* p. 215.

trace, / the pen pourtray—or human tho't embrace." Robert White complained that he and seventeen shipmates were chained to the oar of a galley, where he survived for four years and nine months; others, he said, were "weltering under their chains in the mines, and dragging out a miserable existence, scarce worth possessing."[93]

Yet the narratives represented the Algerines' arbitrary and despotic exercise of power as complemented by a cringing servility. Narrators blamed both extremes of Algerine behavior on their own crushing oppression by the Turks, representing them as a kind of partial paradigm of environmental transformation: subjected to despotic power, they had themselves become despots; made to submit, they had become servile. As James Stevens put it, "in consequence of the violence that is exercised over them, and their total subserviency to the rapacious views of their Turkish oppressors, . . . [e]very spark of political liberty is totally extinguished, and the government has now attained to the very acme of the most horrible despotism."[94]

If Algerine behavior could be understood as a consequence of extreme oppression, and if the servile behavior of slaves of African descent in America could be understood that way as well, then perhaps Americans in slavery would likewise become servile and even depraved. Many narratives seemed to confirm these fears. The daily existence of the American slaves was "scarce worth possessing"; a Christian, after a long captivity, appeared "exceedingly stupid and insensible"; some "turned Turk (adopted Islam)." In *The Algerine Captive* (1797), a convincing imitation of a captivity narrative, Royall Tyler included an incident obviously intended to dramatize just this problem of potential transformation. At the outset of his imprisonment the narrator, Dr. Updike Underhill, resists a whipping and tries to incite his fellow prisoners, long enslaved, to help him bind their overseer and escape: "But I called in vain . . . I spoke to slaves, astonished at my presumption."[95]

Unlike most of the earlier "true story" narratives, however, Tyler's novel proposed an answer to the transformation question. So did several other highly stylized and embellished narratives, some manifestly fictional,

and a number of plays and poems that with few exceptions were published after the return in 1796 of all of the surviving Americans captured by the Algerines (although some appeared before the 1805 return of the crew of the *Philadelphia* from slavery in Tripoli). This second wave of captivity-based works frankly proclaimed the triumph of republican whiteness over the enslavement experience.[96]

These works, in a number of ways, naturalized and embodied for the first time the differences between Algerines/Arabs/Moors/Turks and Euro-Americans. Some transformed the captivity experience into highly sexualized tales of romance and rescue. Unlike the earlier narratives, in which females had virtually no role at all,[97] many featured female characters, both Algerine and American (or sometimes British). Here, for the first time, virtuous whiteness often took the shape of a woman.

For example, in John Vandike's 1801 account ostensibly of his own captivity, the hero risks his life and comfort to save a beautiful English woman who has run from rape in an Algerine captain's seraglio. Before meeting her the hero had spent three apparently secure years in Algiers, during which he had won a position of trust with a wealthy Algerine captain, converted to Islam, and agreed to marry an Algerine lady of fortune. Although he describes his behavior as a ruse to ensure eventual escape, it is only the intervention of the white woman who has risked death to fend off intercourse with an Algerine (in a graphic bedroom scene) who prevents his consummation of a marriage with a woman of color.[98] In other words, even an uncertain whiteness, wilfully submerged and weakened, could be redeemed by a resolute whiteness strengthened by the battle to preserve it. In Susanna Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers*, Fetnah, favorite concubine of the Dey, is actually English but has been raised as a Moslem Algerine; she learns "the love of liberty" and resistance to both the Dey and Islam from Rebecca, who "came from that land, where virtue in either sex is the only mark of superiority.—She was an American."[99] Here, whiteness and virtue

[93] Stevens, *Historical and Geographical Account*, pp. 240, 242; Burnham, "The Curses of Slavery"; Foss, *The Algerine Slaves*, pp. 20–40, 180–84; White, "A Curious, Historial and Entertaining Narrative."

[94] Stevens, *Historical and Geographical Account*, pp. 208–9.

[95] White, "A Curious, Historical and Entertaining Narrative"; Adams, *Narrative*, p. xviii; William Ray, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious, Moral, Sentimental and Humorous. To which is added, a brief sketch of the Author's life and of his captivity and sufferings among the Turks and barbarians of Tripoli* (Auburn, Mass.: U. F. Doubleday, 1821), p. 235; Royall Tyler, *The Algerine Captive; or, The Life and Adventures of Dr. Updike Underhill, Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines* (Walpole, N.H., 1797), 2:23–24.

[96] Allison does not distinguish early from later narratives with respect to the responses of Americans to their captivity; he sees resistance to submission as a nearly universal position (*Crescent Obscured*, pp. 118, 125–26).

[97] Only Stevens discussed the role and behavior of Algerine women, which he cited as evidence of Algerine depravity. He simultaneously condemned Turkish men for believing women to "have no souls" and judged Turkish women to be lascivious, indolent, and tasteless. (*Historical and Geographical Account of Algiers*, pp. 230, 220–22).

[98] John Vandike, *Narrative of the Captivity of John Vandike, who was taken by the Algerines, in 1791. An Acount of his Escape, bringing with him a Beautiful Young English Lady Who was taken in 1790. . . . Translated into English by Mr. James Howe, of Holland* (Leominster, Mass.: Chapman Whitcomb, 1801). Here the hero's unusual susceptibility to the "good life" in Algiers can probably be accounted for by the fact that he was not American but Dutch.

[99] Susanna Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers* (Philadelphia: Wrigley & Berriman, 1794), pp. 9–10.

are unmistakably republican characteristics that can be resurrected because, no matter how submerged, they are innate.

In all these fictionalized and romantic works, proud and virtuous whiteness is portrayed as triumphant over oppression and slavery because it is inborn in all whites, especially Americans. The imagery of descent, linking country and family, appears everywhere. Tyler's Dr. Underhill concludes, "I had been degraded to a slave, and was now advanced to a citizen of the freest country in the universe. I had been lost to my parent, friends, and country, and now found, in the embraces and congratulations of the former and the rights and protection of the latter." Rowson proclaims, "Nor *here* alone, Columbia's sons be free, / *Where'er* they breathe there must be liberty. / —There *must* there *is,* for he who form'd the whole, / Entwin'd blest freedom with th'immortal *soul.*"[100]

Some of the captivity literature, especially the later, fictionalized narratives, also offered a straightforward indictment of American slavery. But this argument, too, depended for its power on a threat to republican whiteness—a threat from a different quarter. Analogies between American and Muslim slavery had been made by some antislavery leaders before the introduction of gradual emancipation As early as 1775, for example, Samuel Hopkins had suggested, "The Mahometans enslaving Christians, and their cruel treatment, . . . might afford matter of reading and declamation suited to awaken people, and make them feel fear[;] tis easy to shew that our treatment of negroes is of the same kind."[101]

After the commencement of northern emancipation, when numbers of Americans had joined Europeans enslaved in Algiers in the 1780s, several newspapers and magazines sympathetic to the antislavery position followed Hopkins's advice. In 1795, the *Rural Magazine; or, Vermont Repository* slyly followed "The Curses of Slavery," subtitled "Treatment of the American Prisoners at Algiers," with "Treatment of the African Slaves in America," subtitled "Intelligence from Africa." Royall Tyler's novel bore an explicit antislavery message, and as late as 1847 Charles Sumner was reciting the history of white slavery in the Barbary States as a compelling antislavery argument before the Boston Mercantile Library Association.[102] These works emphasized the threat to republican virtue more than to whiteness per se, however: slaveholding might turn Americans into debauched tyrants.

The Algerine captivity, then, questioned the meaning of slavery for re-

publicanism and whiteness in two different ways. The power of its implications for slaveholding, directed at the South, gained intensity in the second wave of largely fictionalized narratives, which at the same time confirmed the stability of whiteness and blackness in the face of enslavement. They proclaimed the whiteness and virtue of true republicans—northern, free, white citizens—to be innate and inherited, as was the slavishness and dependency of people of color.

The literatures of role reversal, then, not only posed questions about the mutability of "black" and "white," "slave" and "free citizen" but, especially after 1800, provided clear answers calculated to reassure whites. In every case the answers challenged environmental theory, proposing a radically different conception of human difference: that whiteness and citizenship, savagery and servility were innate characteristics; that there was indeed an immutable human nature that was not subject to substantial change by external experience—a fixed nature to which the somatic or physiognomic could after all provide reliable clues.

The popular conclusion about the stability of whiteness paralleled the direction of scientific thought, which increasingly turned away from environmental explanations in the early nineteenth century. Physicians and philosophers began to offer new physical proofs of essential and permanent "racial" difference and attempted to reconcile such difference with the unity of human descent. Dr. Charles White in England and Drs. John Augustine Smith and Samuel George Morton in the United States were among the earliest of a growing body of critics of environmentalism who argued from anatomical structure and skull shape that there was a biological basis for permanent "racial" difference.[103]

Thus science affirmed what politics demanded: that the instrumentality and dependency of slaves, in fact mapped onto free people of color by the persistence of pre-Revolutionary practices during gradual emancipation, could be understood instead as characteristics innate to "Negroes." People of color could never become citizens; they were not equipped by nature for the role. Similarly, republican whiteness would persist through temporary enslavement, impoverishment, and other degrading experiences (in-

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[100] Tyler, *The Algerine Captive,* pp. 226–27; Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers,* p. ii.

[101] Samuel Hopkins to Levi Hart, 15 January 1775, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Connecticut Historical Society.

[102] *Rural Magazine; or, Vermont Repository,* March 1795, pp. 118–24; Charles Sumner, *White Slavery in the Barbary States. A Lecture before the Boston Mercantile Library Association, Feb. 17, 1847* (Boston: William D. Ticknor, 1847).

[103] Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables; and from the Former to the Latter* (London, 1799); John Augustine Smith, "A Lecture introductory to the second Course of Anatomical Instruction in the College of Physicians and Surgeons for the State of New-York," *New York Medical and Philosophical Journal and Review* 1 (1809): 84–96; Samuel George Morton, *Crania Americana; or, A Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America, to which Is Prefixed an Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1839). See Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots,* pp. 15–44, on the developing argument against environmentalism.

cluding post-Revolutionary social dislocation) because it too was an innate and "natural" quality.

The discourses of science and role reversal thus became mutually reinforcing. Together, they located stable and virtuous republican citizenship in the essential nature of whites; at the same time, they constituted free people of color as essentially and immutably servile, "naturally" unsuitable for citizenship, and fated to remain a permanent element of disorder and a persistent obstacle that whites would need to ignore, overcome, or eliminate in the course of building their new republic.

5

"To Abolish the Black Man":
Enacting the Antislavery Promise

The promise of freedom as it had developed in the context of the New England antislavery movement had always been ambiguous, its fundamental contradiction replicating the one at the heart of slavery itself. "Freedom," like "slavery," encompassed quite different constellations of meaning for the parties involved. To slaves, the freedom promised by antislavery rhetoric meant release from white ownership and enactment of independent agency. To white slaveholders, freedom meant release from the sin of slaveholding, from the heavy responsibilities of owning and managing slaves, and from the daily presence of slaves. To whites who did not themselves hold slaves, whether opposed to slavery or indifferent to it, emancipation promised cessation of the shrill controversy this issue provoked and, ultimately, an end to the presence of slaves in their society. In other words, to whites, regardless of their personal relationship to slavery, "freedom" meant the absence of slaves.

But because it was easy to conflate the elimination of slaves as a category with the elimination of the humans occupying that category, the prospect of an end to slavery undoubtedly had meant to many whites the end of a troubling black presence. The constitution of the Foster Moral Society, a Baptist group in northern Rhode Island, neatly illustrates this point: in it, the members announced themselves determined "to array ourselves

To the memory of my father,

Elton Arthur Pope, 1899–1994