Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse

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Issachar is a strong ass, crouching between the sheepfolds;
he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant;
so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a slave at forced labor.

> —Genesis 49:14–15

And before I'll be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave,
And go home to my lord
and be free.

> —"Oh Freedom," African American spiritual, c. 1830–1865

"Our old friend Samuel Adams used to say 'nations were as free as they deserved to be,'" Benjamin Rush recalled in 1812, musing on the history of the American Revolution and on the ensuing decline in public virtue, as he saw it. John Adams, his correspondent, agreed. "Sam's doctrine . . . is true," he wrote, "and has a good tendency to excite vigilance and energy in defense of freedom." It may seem odd that Benjamin Rush, John Adams, and Samuel Adams, signers of the Declaration of Independence all, could agree on this view of freedom. "Sam's doctrine," as Adams called it, the idea that nations are only as free as they deserve to be, is a far cry from the Declaration of Independence's more memorable formulation: All men created equal, endowed with inalienable rights, including life, the pursuit of happiness—and liberty. If it seems odd, that may be because scholars have been apt to associate the meaning of American freedom with the declaration. Few would deny that the declaration has profoundly influenced the course of American history, providing a universalizing, rights-

based discourse to abolitionists, feminists, workers, and many others. But that discourse has always existed alongside other, less studied meanings of freedom.[1]

The declaration's meaning of freedom may help explain how slavery was abolished, but it is less helpful in explaining how slavery survived for so long. Many years ago, Samuel Johnson famously asked why "we hear the loudest *yelps* for liberty among the drivers of negroes." Satisfactory answers remain elusive. Historians have tended to formulate the issue—in the words of David Brion Davis—as a problem of *slavery* in the age of revolutions, the problem arising from the obvious and unresolvable contradiction between freedom and slavery. Another way to formulate the question is to focus on the problem of *freedom* in the age of revolutions and to ask: What *other* meanings were implied when Americans yelped for liberty? One important answer begins with "Sam's doctrine": the belief that nations (understood in the eighteenth-century sense, as peoples with shared culture or *moeurs,* rather than in the more modern sense of nation-states) are only as free as they deserve. Sam's doctrine opens the way toward a very different conceptualization of both freedom and slavery in early American life. Unlike the Declaration of Independence, it locates slavery and freedom on a continuum. It pushes us *beyond* the alleged contradictions between freedom and slavery in early American political discourse and highlights their interconnections instead.[2]

This essay argues that the American Revolution joined liberal, republican, and religious traditions to define freedom as autonomy, or the capacity for human agency—that is, individuals' ability to act in secular time and shape their circumstances. A mythologized narrative of the American Revolution promulgated by early republican print culture powerfully authorized this view, transmitting a belief that the Revolution was above all an act of heroic resistance by a people threatened with slavery. That narrative promoted a liberal-republican ideology that linked freedom to

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[1] Benjamin Rush to John Adams, July 20, 1812, in *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805–1813,* ed. John A. Schutz and Douglass Adair (San Marino,1966), 234; Adams to Rush, Aug. 1, 1812, *ibid.*, 235.

[2] Samuel Johnson quoted in David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, 1966), 3. On meanings of "nation," see *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 2d ed., s.v. "nation"; and David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 5–6. The scholarship on slavery and American revolutionary and nationalist ideologies is vast. I cite here only the studies that have most influenced this argument: most especially Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 4; and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, 1975), 275. See also Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Baltimore, 1969); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914* (Middletown, 1987); William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York, 1994), 12–33; Jack P. Greene, *All Men Are Created Equal: Some Reflections on the Character of the American Revolution: An Inaugural Lecture* (Oxford, 1976); Jack P. Greene, "'Slavery or Independence': Some Reflections on the Relationship among Liberty, Black Bondage, and Equality in Revolutionary South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine,* 80 (July 1979), 193–214; Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, 1988); Nathan Huggins, *Black Odyssey: The African-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York, 1990), xi–lvii; Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (Armonk, 1996); Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton, 1996); Maggie Montesinos Sale, *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity* (Durham, 1997); Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York, 1998); and Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670–1830* (Chapel Hill, 1999), esp. 57–122.

resistance, grounding slavery in an act of individual choice—consent, even—and thereby legitimating slavery on principles consistent with the American Revolution.

Liberty, Slavery, and Autonomy in Early American Political Discourse

In formulating their resistance to imperial policy, eighteenth-century British North Americans drew on a rich heritage of thought about freedom or liberty—terms that may be conflated for the purposes of this essay. A largely secular tradition of liberty descended from ancient Greek and Roman discourse, was resurrected by Renaissance humanist thinkers, was reshaped in the political struggles of seventeenth-century England, and filtered through eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought. Although the precise meaning of freedom during this long history remained unsettled, premodern and early modern thought aligned in two ways. First, meanings of freedom/liberty in the Greek, Latin, Indo-European, and Teutonic languages all related to unimpeded motion, the ability to act within an autonomous sphere. Theorists have disagreed about whether true freedom must extend beyond this "negative" position. Nevertheless, whether adhering to views liberal or republican, positive or negative, ancient or modern, individual or collective, few have denied that freedom must at the least include the ability to act without constraints. Second, since their earliest meanings, liberty and freedom have always been defined in relation to slavery. The Greek, Latin, Germanic, and Celtic words for free all meant not a slave, and the opposite of free in Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse was *theo* and *thrael* (slave). (It is thus not surprising that the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s first definition of free is "not in bondage to another.") Drawing on that heritage, seventeenth-century British discourse strengthened the antinomy between liberty and slavery. In their influential treatises, John Locke, Algernon Sidney, and John Milton all contrasted slavery and freedom. Indeed, it is often forgotten that the very first word of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* was "slavery."[3]

Equally important to eighteenth-century meanings of freedom was the partly overlapping tradition of dissenting Protestantism, particularly its more radical Calvinist variants, in which "slavery" and "freedom" carried important theological weight. Traditional Protestant theology adhered to a strict belief in original sin: Humans were born into slavery, or bondage, to sin. Faced with devastating challenges

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[3] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government: In the Former, the False Principles and Foundation of Sir Robert Filmer and his Followers are Detected and Overthrown, the Latter is an Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government* (London, 1690), 1. This discussion draws especially on J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975); Philip Pettit, "Liberalism and Republicanism," *Australian Journal of Political Science,* 28 (Special Issue, 1993), 162–89; and Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998), esp. 36–57. See also David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, Eng., 2000), 125–45. On distinctions between freedom and liberty, see Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, "Are Freedom and Liberty Twins?," *Political Theory,* 16 (Nov. 1988), 523–56. The most influential twentieth-century statement of the distinction between positive and negative liberty is Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958* (Oxford, Eng., 1958). It generated a literature too vast to summarize here. For a survey of the relevant arguments, see Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism,* 5–11, 17–21, 77–85, 96–99. On the semantic origins of freedom and liberty, I have drawn on Pitkin, "Are Freedom and Liberty Twins?," 530–32, 536, 537; C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge, Eng., 1960), 111, 113, 114; and *Oxford English Dictionary,* 2d ed., s.v. "free."

from secular Enlightenment thought, strict predestinarian versions of American Calvinism were recast to make room for a more voluntarist view that, not incidentally, paralleled an understanding of freedom as autonomy: humans had at least the theoretical choice of embracing or resisting sin. Despite this partial and uneasy reconciliation, the doctrine of original sin remained in tension with natural rights theories of human freedom.[4]

This whole unstable mix came to a boil in the eighteenth century, reconfiguring meanings of freedom and slavery and fusing their secular and sacred connotations. Certain configurations are well known: most obviously the emergent rights-based discourse that grounded the universalism of the Declaration of Independence and other statements of natural rights. Others, however, remain largely unexamined. To understand the roots of the particular configuration of concern here, let us glance briefly at some basic ingredients of early American political discourse.

James T. Kloppenberg is correct to conclude that "we ought to think of autonomy rather than freedom as the aim of the American Revolution, autonomy not only for the nation, but for individuals as well." By replacing freedom with autonomy, Kloppenberg offers a conceptual advance on most analyses of the Revolution, which tend to treat freedom as an unproblematic term. Although "autonomy" is hardly a static concept, it has a more specific meaning than "freedom." For the purposes of this essay, I use *autonomy* to mean a belief that humans are endowed with the capacity for will or agency and the consequent belief that worldly events are produced by human action, rather than providential guidance, chance, or fortune.[5]

This meaning of autonomy was central to early America's most important political traditions. It figured prominently in what later became known as liberalism, a multifaceted tradition whose different strands all understood liberty negatively, as the absence of coercion. Grounded in property, focused on individual rights, legitimized by consent, and buttressed by contractual theory, the emergent liberal tradition assumed the existence of an autonomous human agent whose actions shape history.[6]

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[4] The problem of free will was much more easily resolved within the Anglican than within the Puritan tradition. See especially Jon Pahl, *Paradox Lost: Free Will and Political Liberty in American Culture, 1630–1760* (Baltimore, 1992); and Leo P. Hirrel, *Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform* (Lexington, Mass., 1998), 1–2, 19, 21, 30–35, 49, 137.

[5] James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History,* 74 (June 1987), 9–33, esp. 23.

[6] It is anachronistic to use the term *liberalism* before its invention, a usage that brings together many strands and exaggerates their coherence. For studies that locate liberalism in the variegated ideological landscape of American political culture, see especially Dorothy Ross, "Liberalism," in *Encyclopedia of American Political History: Studies of the Principal Movements and Ideas,* ed. Jack P. Greene (3 vols., New York, 1984), II, 750–62; Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991); Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, 1997); James T. Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York, 1998); Foner, *Story of American Freedom;* and Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998). For depictions of liberalism as shaped in tandem with other sometimes opposing ideologies, see James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870–1920* (New York, 1986); Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (New York, 1991); and Gary Gerstle, "The Protean Character of American Liberalism," *American Historical Review,* 99 (Oct. 1994), 1043–73.

In this regard, liberalism overlapped with the classical republican or neo-Roman tradition. Central to republican thought was a view of humans as rational agents able to dominate history, tame the chaotic, centrifugal force of *fortuna,* and bend circumstances to their will. If full liberation was ultimately impossible, humans could at least delay the cyclical motion of history through forceful action. This understanding of human agency underlay eighteenth-century meanings of "virtue." As J. G. A. Pocock has shown, *virtù* meant more than political virtue—resistance to corruption, landed independence, disinterestedness. It connoted humans' ability to act in historical time, to overcome circumstances, and to create history.[7]

Certain aspects of Protestant theology also elevated human agency or autonomy. As Perry Miller read it, Puritanism's covenant theology created a space for human agency within a universe of predestination. Much as *virtù* opposed itself to random, chaotic *fortuna* in classical republican thought, so the covenant of grace opposed itself to a lawless, inscrutable God, mysterious and terrible, thus opening a space for human agency within Puritan cosmology.[8] A similar dynamic operated in evangelical Protestantism, particularly the "religious populism" that preceded and followed the American Revolution. With its emphasis on individual faith and its anti-institutional ethos, evangelical Protestantism inspired many to social action and reform. Some varieties of millennial thought further reinforced a belief in agency, conflating popish "slavery" with civil forms of "tyranny" and holding that resistance to both would usher in the new millennium. Perhaps most significant for our purposes, Protestantism connected agency to *virtue,* enriching its republican associations. If strict Calvinism denied that good works would in and of themselves lead to salvation, it nevertheless posited strong associations between redemption and virtue: degeneration accompanied moral failure; prosperity, moral virtue.[9]

The settlement of the continent and the transformation of the wilderness from an Indian land to a European one further reinforced the eighteenth-century view of humans as active, autonomous agents. Although hardly new, reflections on the relationship between humans and their environment flourished in the eighteenth cen-

[7] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment.* The literature on what is variously called classical republicanism, civic humanism, or neo-Roman thought in early America is vast. For useful historiographic essays with full citations, see Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 39 (April 1982), 334–56; Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History,* 79 (June 1992), 11–38; and Alan Gibson, "Ancients, Moderns, and Americans: The Republican-Liberalism Debate Revisited," *History of Political Thought,* 21 (Summer 2000), 261–307.

[8] Miller, *New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century,* 395–96, 402, 449. On the tension between will and necessity in Puritan thought, see Pahl, *Paradox Lost,* 19–51.

[9] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, 1989), 5; Kloppenberg, "Virtues of Liberalism," 12–14, 25; Hirrel, *Children of Wrath,* 1–2, 19, 21, 30–35, 49, 137; Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 188, 235, 265–66; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (New York, 1988), 181–205; Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York, 1997); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, 1977); James H. Moorhead, "Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800–1880," *Journal of American History,* 71 (Dec. 1984), 524–42; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985); J. C. D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge, Eng., 1994). On early Protestant resistance theory, see Robert M. Kingdon, "Calvinism and Resistance Theory," in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700,* ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge, Eng., 1991), 193–218.

tury. As Europeans questioned the origins of society with more theoretical and scientific rigor, older static views of that relationship yielded to a belief that human action could shape natural environments. Influential thinkers such as George-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, held that humans might modify their environment, alter their surroundings, and thus shape their circumstances. Humans, he argued, possess the ability "to change the face of the earth, to convert deserts into fertile ground, and heath into corn." Ultimately, Buffon concluded, "man can have an influence on the climate he inhabits. . . . [He] may in time destroy what injures him, and give birth to every thing that is agreeable to his feelings."[10]

Liberal, republican, Protestant, and environmental theories thus converged in the late eighteenth century to locate an active, autonomous "man" at the center of history and society, reformulating the place of humans in the world. Many believed that the United States, as a nation conceived in the political and intellectual revolutions of the late eighteenth century, would produce a "new man," in the words of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. Capable of resisting tyranny, shaping his surroundings—capable of creating history—"this new man" was above all endowed with an autonomous will, with human agency. Freedom for revolutionary Americans thus meant more than national independence, more than the right of self-determination, more even than the absence of physical and political coercion. The meaning of freedom enshrined by America's revolutionary and nationalist ideologies also lay in humans' *agency:* their ability to alter circumstances, to change the environment, to reform government, and above all to resist oppression.[11]

If a conceptual antinomy between freedom and slavery ran through much Western thought, never was it more potent than in the late eighteenth century. "'Slavery,'" Bernard Bailyn has observed, "was a central concept in eighteenth-century political discourse. As the absolute political evil, it appears in every statement of political principle, in every discussion of constitutionalism or legal rights, in every exhortation to resistance." Indeed, few features of the colonists' discourse are more striking than their oft-repeated fear of "enslavement." "There seems to be a direct, and formal design on foot, to enslave all America," wrote John Adams in 1765. People in all regions perceived that "design." As events led toward revolution, recalled a Massachusetts resident, "the people were told weekly that the ministry had formed a plan to enslave them." The same was true in Virginia, where Patrick Henry was said to have called the political feud "a question of freedom or slavery"; Rhode Island, where Gov.

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[10] [George-Louis Leclerc], Count de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular,* trans. William Smellie (9 vols., London, 1785), IX, 396, 404, 400–402. The scholarly literature on the relationship between humans and nature is substantial and expanding. I have drawn on Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea* (New York, 1936), 183–287; Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1964), 386–471; Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1967); Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900,* trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh, 1973); and Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, 1982).

[11] J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer; and, Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America* (1782; New York, 1981), 69.

Stephen Hopkins feared that British taxation would reduce Americans "to the most abject slavery"; and South Carolina, where the Reverend William Tennent worried that Americans might "be reduced to a State of the most abject Slavery." As the adjective "abject" suggests, political "slavery" was not understood merely metaphorically; its conceptual force lay in the parallel with the "other": the African slave. Recent scholarship has firmly established that the presence of chattel slavery in America added a powerful dimension to the fear of political slavery. "The word *slavery* used to express fears of oppression in a country where slaves are constantly before one's eyes or at least are a living presence," remarks the political theorist Judith Shklar, "has a different meaning from its use as merely a figure of speech."[12]

Thus, white Americans continually illustrated the dangers of political slavery by reference to African slaves. In 1760 Joseph Galloway warned that by submitting to odious British policies, "You will become slaves indeed, in no respect different from the sooty *Africans,* whose persons and properties are subject to the disposal of their tyrannical masters." In 1774 George Washington similarly warned that to "Submit to every Imposition that can be heap'd upon us . . . will make us as tame, & abject Slaves, as the Blacks we Rule over with such arbitrary Sway." A Philadelphian drew the same parallel one year later. "What security have we, that they [the British] will not one day portion amongst themselves, our fair inheritances, and force us into their new claimed fields, like *Guinea slaves,* to till the soil?" Such statements cannot be dismissed as mere hyperbolic rhetoric. The belief that the British government, if not resisted, would enslave *all* Americans helps explain why the mildly obnoxious acts of an inept imperial administration could have inspired such heated resistance. As the colonists' liberties seemed increasingly under assault during the late 1760s and 1770s, even the cautious Washington concluded that the British government wished to "fix the Shackles of Slavry upon us" and "reduc[e] us to the most abject state of Slavery that ever was designd for Mankind." An owner of several hundred slaves, Washington did not use the term lightly; he knew what slavery meant.[13]

[12] Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 232; John Adams, *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765), in *The American Intellectual Tradition: A Sourcebook,* ed. David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper (2 vols., New York, 1993), I, 119; the Massachusetts resident Daniel Leonard quoted in Richard Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, 1992), 202; Patrick Henry quoted in William Wirt, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (Philadelphia, 1817), 120; Stephen Hopkins, *Rights of the Colonies Examined* (1764), in *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750–1776,* ed. Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 516; William Tennent quoted in Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore, 1985), 88; Shklar, *American Citizenship,* 22–23. On the rhetorical connections between slavery and liberty, see Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York, 1992), 37; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom,* 376–87; Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765–1820* (New York, 1971), 58–68; Greene, "'Slavery or Independence'"; F. Nwabueze Okoye, "Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 37 (Jan. 1980), 3–28; David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991), 27–31; Foner, *Story of American Freedom;* and Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (Charlottesville, 2000), 151–53. On a later period, see Anders Stephanson, "Liberty or Death: The Cold War as US Ideology," in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory,* ed. Odd Arne Westad (Portland, Ore., 2000), 81–100. On the abject as the "other," see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), 169–70.

[13] Joseph Galloway and Richard Wells quoted in Okoye, "Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries," 12, 13–14; George Washington to Bryan Fairfax, Aug. 24, 1774, in *The Papers of George Washington: Colonial Series,* vol. X, ed. W. W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville, 1995), 155; Washington to

David Brion Davis has suggestively observed that the American Revolution "may have raised obstacles to 'unearned' emancipation. Since the Revolution tended to define liberty as the reward for righteous struggle, it was difficult to think of freedom as something that could be granted to supposedly passive slaves." If the connection between metaphorical and chattel slavery led some people—mostly slaves or free blacks and a few whites such as the political leader James Otis and the theologian Samuel Hopkins—toward abolitionism, that was by no means the only logical outcome. For many people the conclusion was quite different: Just as white Americans acted to resist their enslavement, so it fell to chattel slaves to resist theirs.[14]

The American Revolution left a twinned legacy: a call to freedom linked with an obligation to resist. The most extreme form of this view held that a person must be willing to sacrifice his life in order to defend his freedom. "Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains, and slavery?" asked Patrick Henry. "I know not what course others may take," he famously continued, "but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!" During the early nineteenth century, that cry of liberty or death became the greatest of all revolutionary slogans: Henry's speech was printed in no fewer than thirty-five editions of William Wirt's 1817 biography of Henry and excerpted in innumerable schoolbooks and other popular texts—including William Holmes McGuffey's *Eclectic Readers*, first published in 1836, of which between 50 and 120 million copies were eventually sold. All men might be endowed with natural liberty, the ubiquitous slogan implied, but they must nevertheless act to preserve that freedom. Many others agreed. "The time is now near at hand which must probably determine, whether Americans are to be, Freemen, or Slaves. . . . Our cruel and unrelenting Enemy leaves us no choice but a brave resistance, or the most abject submission," wrote George Washington. "We have therefore to resolve to conquer or die." Such views rested on a well-understood historical schema. Without the virtue to sustain freedom, liberty would collapse into tyranny and enslavement. Only by assertive action—in the ultimate account, by risking their lives—could colonists preserve their liberty. "When republican virtue fails," Tom Paine succinctly stated, "slavery ensues." Freedom and slavery thus became linked to virtue, understood as the will to resist tyranny.[15]

George William Fairfax, June 10, 1774, *ibid.*, 97; Washington to Bryan Fairfax, July 20, 1774, *ibid.*, 131.

[14] Davis, *Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution,* 257. See also, *ibid.*, 259, 282; and Greene, *All Men Are Created Equal,* 30–31.

[15] Since Wirt reconstructed the speech much later, the accuracy of its most felicitous phrase is questionable. Whether or not Wirt's reconstruction was accurate, however, its enormous diffusion made it part of the Revolution's legacy, as it promoted a certain idea of resistance and freedom. Wirt, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry,* 123; Wm. H. McGuffey, *Mcguffey's New Sixth Eclectic Reader: Exercises in Rhetorical Reading, With Introductory Rules and Examples* (Cincinnati, 1857), 118–21, as cited in Digital Research Library, University Library System, University of Pittsburgh, *Nietz Old Textbook Collection: 19th Century Schoolbooks* <http://digital. library.pitt.edu/nietz/fulltext/> (Jan. 6, 2003); Elliott J. Gorn, "Introduction: Educating America," in *The McGuffey Readers: Selections from the 1879 Edition,* ed. Elliott J. Gorn (Boston, 1998), 2; "General Orders," July 2, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series,* vol. V, ed. W. W. Abbot and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville, 1993), 180; Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), in *Common Sense and Related Readings,* ed. Thomas P. Slaughter (Boston, 2001), 86. The speech was reprinted in many schoolbooks, for example, Ebenezer Bancroft Williston, *Eloquence of the United States* (Middletown, 1827), 60–63.

Such statements offered a particular understanding of slavery. If people proved their virtue by maintaining their freedom, they proved their lack of it by submitting to slavery. "They, who are willing to be made slaves and to lose their rights, as Issachar, without one struggle," wrote a Massachusetts author in 1761, stating the point baldly, "justly deserve the miseries and insults an imperious despot can put upon them. They richly deserve to be trampled on by the whole chain of wretches." A virtuous person would resist slavery, even at the cost of life itself. An abject person, by contrast, would submit and would "justly deserve" the slavery that ensued. This view was not racially specific, but universalizable to white as well as black. "At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation," declared George Washington in his *Circular to the States* of 1783, a text whose fame was only surpassed by his later Farewell Address, "and if their Citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be intirely their own." If Americans fell into tyranny and enslavement, they would have only themselves to blame. They would *deserve* their fate.[16]

America's revolutionary rhetoric thus merged slavery and freedom into conceptual twins. The antinomies persisted even in the freighted adjectives: if "freedom" was opposed to "slavery," "resistance" to "submission," so was "virtuous" opposed to "abject," a word frequently paired with slavery, as in: "abject slavery." Freedom and slavery stood, not in dialectical contradiction to, but in tension with, each other. Slavery was the falling away from, or perversion of, freedom and could not simply be externalized onto an other. The slide from virtuous freedom to abject slavery remained a possibility for *all* Americans, white and black. The implications for slavery were important. Because all humans were endowed with the capacity of acting in historical time, the choice to resist or submit fell to every person, whether slave or free. Which choice had slaves apparently made? Their continued enslavement gave the answer. Free whites and African slaves alike could thus be held responsible for maintaining their freedom or submitting to slavery. This logic had the benefit of eliding the problem of slavery's origins—so vexing to Locke and other seventeenth-century theorists. Even someone born into slavery had the capacity to resist or die trying. Continued enslavement thus signified a choice to submit, legitimating the institution by an implied consent. Other subtle distinctions—as between collective and individual freedom—were also elided. Indeed, it may well have been the particular mix of liberal and republican thought in early America that allowed writers and polemicists to slip between the two. Where republican, or neo-Roman, thought held that freedom was achieved or lost collectively, through participatory governance and vigilance, liberal theory concerned itself with the individual, elevating consent as the basis of political legitimacy. Combined with intensely individualistic Calvinist views

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[16] Massachusetts author quoted in Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts,* 209; "George Washington to Meschech Weare, et al., June 8, 1783, Circular Letter of Farewell to Army," in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799,* ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (39 vols., Washington, 1931–1944), XXVI, 484–85. See also Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britian, 1765–1776* (New York, 1991), 31, 42–43, 62; and Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery,* 88.
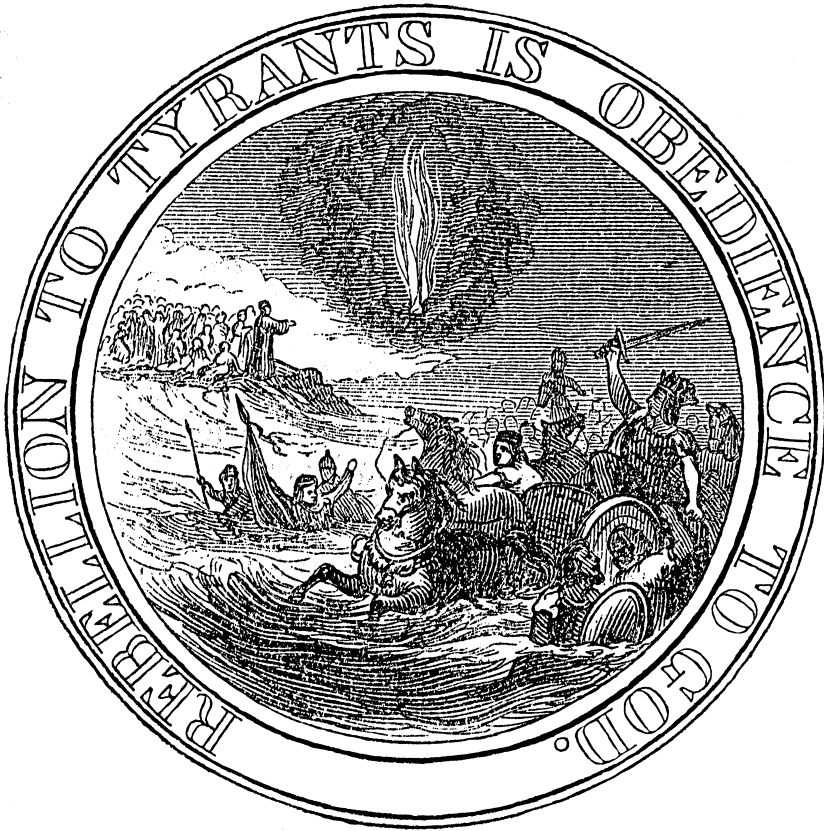
Figure 1. Benson Lossing's mid-nineteenth-century rendering of Benjamin Franklin's seal for the United States, proposed in 1776. The seal shows pharaoh's army foundering as the freed Israelites look on from safety, suggesting the power of slavery in shaping Americans' national image. If the design here depicted freedom as the result of divine will, more often early national print culture made freedom a result of Americans' own agency, their virtuous resistance to tyranny. *Reprinted from* Harper's New Monthly Magazine, *July 1856. Courtesy Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-12960.*

of slavery, early American political discourse enabled a slippage between collective and individual freedom. Just as a *people* or nation lost its rights by failing to act, so this peculiar combination of liberal and republican ideology made it possible to blame a *person* for his or her enslavement. To illustrate, let us examine how the Revolution came to be seen by postrevolutionary Americans.[17]

Revolution, Resistance, and Reaction

The new nation's burgeoning print culture, operating through school books, biographies, almanacs, and other popular literature, promulgated a narrative of the Revolu-

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[17] This paragraph has been much improved by the many challenging thoughts and comments of Anders Stephanson. See also Stephanson, "Liberty or Death."

tion as a successful act of resistance by a people threatened with slavery, rather than as a complex geopolitical event whose success rested on contingent political, military, and diplomatic factors. That narrative defined freedom as the fruit of virtuous revolutionary resistance. Enshrining individual action as the motor of history, this postrevolutionary definition of freedom—not the only meaning during this period, let it be noted—provided an insidious new legitimation of slavery, which placed the onus of freedom on slaves themselves and on individual acts of resistance.

As Benjamin Franklin's proposed seal for the United States suggests (see figure 1), the iconography of slavery powerfully shaped views of the American Revolution in early American political discourse. Americans, like the ancient Israelites, were led out of slavery into the promised land of freedom. But unlike the Israelites, saved by God who slew the Egyptians in the Red Sea—and perhaps it is for this reason that a different image was chosen for the official seal in 1783—white Americans had freed themselves *by their own agency.* Or so the story went. "When therefore the Colonies saw that the face of [Lord] North was set against them for evil," wrote Mason Locke Weems in his biography of George Washington, one of the most popular works of American history (a book that Abraham Lincoln recalled as formative in shaping his view of the Revolution), "they rose up as one man . . . resolved like true-born sons of Britons to live free and happy, or, not to live at all." That narrative dramatically simplified the Revolution. It erased all historical contingency, substituting a heroic act of resistance as the motor of the Revolution—indeed, of history. "When the moment arrived which was to degrade and humiliate the American people to a condition with the slaves of the East," declared James Monroe to the Virginia General Assembly in 1801, "they proved themselves equal to the crisis. They declared themselves an independent people, and by an heroick exertion made themselves so." Even the great Puritan handbook, the *New England Primer,* was edited to reflect this altered understanding. (See figure 2.) Whereas children had once been taught the letter *W* with the couplet:

> Whales in the Sea
> God's Voice obey.

The revised lesson read:

> By WASHINGTON,
> Great deeds were done.

It is hard to imagine a better example of the revolutionary understanding of agency: God's agency, once the mover of all worldly deeds, even those of whales, was increasingly supplanted by human agency, epitomized by a Washington who did great deeds.[18]

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[18] [M. L. Weems], *A History of the Life and Death, Virtues, and Exploits, of General George Washington, Dedicated to Mrs. Washington* (George-Town, [1800]), 10; "To the Speakers of the House of Delegates, and of the Senate," Dec. 7, 1801, in *The Writings of James Monroe, Including a Collection of His Public and Private Papers and Correspondence. . . . ,* ed. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (7 vols., New York, 1900), III, 305; George Livermore, *The Origin, History, and Character of the New England Primer* (New York, 1915), 27. For Abraham Lincoln's reference to Weems, see Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (9 vols., New Brunswick, 1953–1955), IV, 235–36. On Lincoln's childhood reading, see especially Michael P. Johnson, "Introduction: Abraham Lincoln,
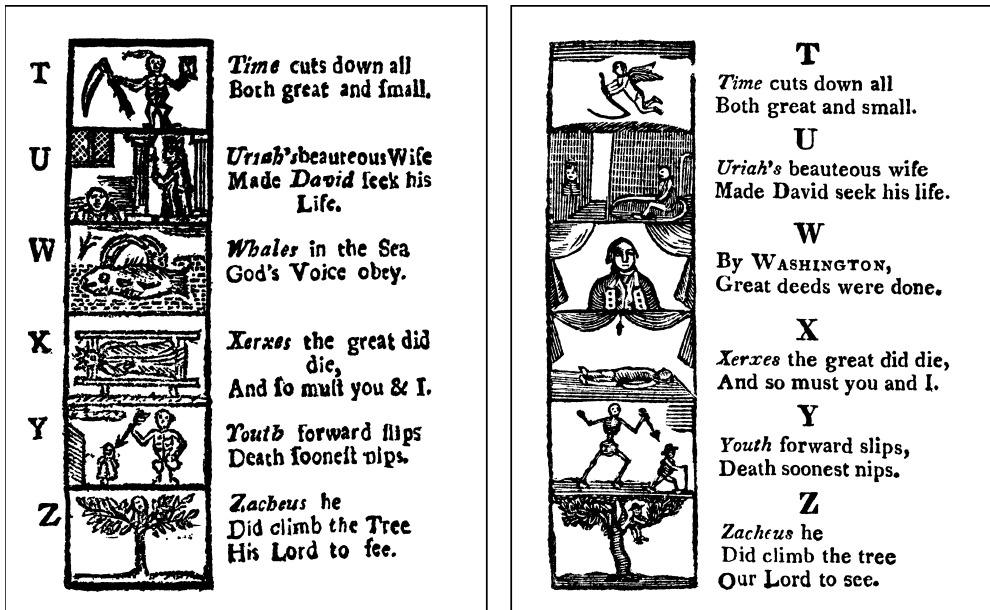
Figure 2. A comparison of these *New England Primer* pages from 1737 (left) and 1822 (right) shows that later editions emphasized human agency as the motor of history. The earlier edition, featuring the couplet "Whales in the Sea / God's Voice obey," was used throughout the colonial period and by many printers well into the nineteenth century. The 1822 page reflects the alteration made in many editions published after the American Revolution: "By WASHINGTON, / Great deeds were done." *Reprinted from Paul Leicester Ford,* The New England Primer: A History of Its Origin and Development with a Reprint of the Unique Copy of the Earliest Known Edition. . . . *(1737; n.p., 1897). Reprinted from* The New England Primer, Improved: For the more easy attaining of the true Reading of English. . . . *(Albany, 1822). Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.*

The narrative of resistance, slavery, and freedom reached a vast audience, powerfully inflecting early national political discourse. Consider, for instance, a toast proclaimed at a July 4 celebration in 1795, held by the combined Democratic, Tammany, Mechanic, and Military societies of New York and dedicated to "The People of the United States." "May they always possess the wisdom to discern their rights, virtue to deserve and courage to maintain and defend them." For this Republican speaker, freedom stemmed partly from people's "rights." But it also rested on the "virtue" necessary to "deserve" them: People proved themselves worthy of freedom by resisting tyranny. A song from that same July 4 celebration, in which British tyranny merged seamlessly into the tyranny of the Federalist party, offered further evidence of such people's virtue. "Swear firmly to stand, / 'Till oppression is driven quite out of the land," sang the group, concluding with the rousing vow that they would "DIE, OR BE FREE."[19]

Wordsmith," in *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches,* ed. Michael P. Johnson (Boston, 2001), 1–10.

[19] *New York Journal,* July 8, 1795, in *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790–1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions, and Toasts,* ed. Philip S. Foner (Westport, 1976), 224, 231.

People of vastly different social classes and political orientations used the same language. Railing against the War of 1812, for instance, the ardent Federalist Josiah Quincy warned that the people of Massachusetts would become "slaves" if they did not resist odious trade policies: "If the people of the commonwealth of Massachusetts shall ever become slaves," argued Quincy, "it will be from choice and not from nature; it will be, not because they have not the power to maintain their freedom, but *because they are unworthy of it.*" If people had to make themselves worthy of freedom, an enslaved person by definition deserved that fate—an argument Quincy fearlessly broached. If the people of Massachusetts sink into slavery, he warned, "we deserve what we endure. We deserve to be, what we are,—of no more weight than slaves." If Quincy here suggested a distinction between people with the power to maintain their freedom and others who lacked that power, this subtlety was rare indeed. In virtually every other context, issues of power, circumstance, and contingency were erased. By viewing people as autonomous, self-willed, rational individuals, America's revolutionary ideology elided the vast difference between whites threatened with political slavery and blacks enduring chattel slavery. Instead, it drew the distinction between people who "deserved" freedom and people who did not, between those who had "chosen" resistance and those who had "chosen" slavery. Here was the crucial conceptual move: By erasing such distinctions, the ideology grounded itself in a fantasy of consent, shifting the moral burden of slavery from the slaveholder to the slave.[20]

It has traditionally been held that, in affirming a natural and inalienable right to human freedom and equality, the Revolution undermined the legitimacy of American slavery. Whether they examine pro- or antislavery thought, most analysts agree. "So long as Americans revered the Revolution and its ideology, slavery was an inseparable evil," argues Larry E. Tise, in the most astute analysis of proslavery ideology I know. Even for Tise, who sees proslavery as a central feature of antebellum political culture in the North as well as the South, defending slavery entailed a rejection of the Revolution's theories of liberty. "It was only when they thought of slavery *outside* the perspective of Revolutionary ideology that they ascribed good to it."[21]

There is obvious truth to this account. The Revolution and its language of rights provided a powerful discourse to abolitionists, democrats, women's rights advocates, workers, and many others.[22] But their efforts may have blinded us to other meanings of freedom and slavery during this period, and other uses of American liberal and

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[20] Josiah Quincy, *An Oration delivered before the Washington Benevolent Society of Massachusetts, on the Thirtieth Day of April, 1813, Being the Anniversary of the First Inauguration of President Washington* (Boston, 1813), 18, 28. Emphasis added.

[21] Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens, Ga., 1987), 37. Emphasis added. See also *ibid.*, 33, 36, 39, 262. I agree with much in Tise's work. I cite him here to emphasize differences with the strongest, rather than the weakest, historiography. For a discussion that locates both pro- and antislavery thought in a broad liberal universe, see David F. Ericson, *The Debate over Slavery: Antislavery and Proslavery Liberalism in Antebellum America* (New York, 2000), 16–36, 93–153.

[22] See, for example, Philip S. Foner, ed., *We, the Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence by Labor Groups, Farmers, Woman's Rights Advocates, Socialists, and Blacks, 1829–1975* (Urbana, 1976).

republican traditions that allowed people to justify slavery fully *within* the perspective of American revolutionary ideology. In this respect—perhaps only in this respect—the Hartzian paradigm still reigns. Although historians have long since dismantled Louis Hartz's argument that the United States was dominated by a Lockean view that all men are by their nature free and equal, many persist in viewing slavery and the South much as Hartz viewed them: a curious anomaly, abnormality, or aberration of American political culture, a departure from revolutionary ideology.

Most scholars now agree that early American political culture was neither exclusively Lockean nor exclusively liberal. It contained, not one, but several liberal traditions, which always existed alongside other ideologies, many of them transnational, all overlapping in a variety of ways. One configuration fused an individualizing liberal ideology with republican theory—according to which freedom resulted from eternal vigilance and ultimately from resistance to tyranny—and with Protestant associations of freedom with virtue, slavery with sin. This fusion created a liberal-republican ideology with powerful and pernicious implications. The belief that a failure to resist tyranny made people "tame" and "abject," suiting them for slavery, became increasingly common after the Revolution. Consider a school book edited and sold by the Philadelphia printer Mathew Carey and endorsed by none other than Thomas Jefferson that offered the following lesson:

> Who lives, and is not weary of a life
> Expos'd to manacles, deserves them well.

Another selection made the same point:

> When liberty is lost,
> Let abject cowards live; but in the brave
> It were a treachery to themselves, enough
> To merit chains.

Such lessons provided a clear account of the origins of slavery. Slavery did not result from conquest or misfortune, but from a lack of virtue. It resulted from a *choice* to live in slavery rather than die with virtue. Slavery could be the well-deserved state of abject cowards.[23]

Although hardly universal, this view of freedom and slavery was widely held. Not only Democratic-Republican societies, but a broad range of Americans—socially, politically, and geographically—articulated it. Perhaps most important in this regard were school books such as Carey's, which carried this meaning of slavery and freedom to children throughout the North and South. Consider, for instance, Lindley Murray's *English Reader,* first published in 1799, by far the most popular reader in the early nineteenth century. Endorsed by Lincoln as "the best schoolbook ever put in the hands of an American Youth," it is estimated to have sold some five million copies during the first half of the nineteenth century. Intended to teach children both reading and virtue, Murray's reader was a compilation of quotations and anecdotes

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[23] Mathew Carey, *The School of Wisdom; or, American Monitor. Containing a Copious Collection of Sublime and Elegant Extracts, From the Most Eminent Writers, on Morals, Religion, and Government* (Philadelphia, 1803), 100, 165.

culled from writers both ancient and modern. "The slavery produced by vice appears in the dependence under which it brings the sinner, to circumstances of external fortune," read one selection. By contrast, the selection continued:

> One of the favourite characters of liberty, is the independence it bestows. He who is truly a freeman is above all servile compliances, and abject subjection. . . . But the sinner has forfeited every privilege of this nature. His passions and habits render him an absolute dependent on the world, and the world's favour; on the uncertain goods of fortune, and the fickle humours of men. . . . His hope and fears all hang upon the world. He partakes in all its vicissitudes; and is moved and shaken by every wind of fortune. This is to be in the strictest sense a slave to the world.

Associating liberty with virtue and independence, and slavery with sin, dependence, and abjection, this selection joined stoic views of slavery to Protestant and republican discourses to define freedom and slavery as a personal choice. Each state depended on the individual's inner spiritual worth, the virtuous freeman rising above the vicissitudes of fortune to make himself independent, the slave submitting and "forfeiting" the privileges of freedom. The point was echoed in a quotation from the seventeenth-century English poet John Dryden in Mathew Carey's school book. "Man makes his fate according to his mind: / The weak low spirit fortune makes her slave, / But she's a druge when hector'd by the brave." White Americans could look back on the Revolution for confirmation that they were worthy, among "the brave." After all, they had resisted tyranny and gained freedom. By the same logic, the persistence of millions in chattel slavery suggested that, lacking the virtue to free themselves—having made the choice to submit to fortune rather than to resist or die—slaves *deserved* their obnoxious condition.[24]

Some might wish to absolve the liberal component of this liberal-republican ideology, associating liberalism with the Declaration of Independence's statement of universal rights, and instead to see republicanism as the culprit here. And it is true that the classical republican or neo-Roman tradition did historically tolerate slavery by defining slaves as nonpersons. Even more, the enslavement of some people made Athenian and Roman liberty possible for others. Nevertheless, while republican theory was historically compatible with slavery, the liberal components of the liberal-republican ideology were just as powerful in authorizing American slavery as its republican and Protestant elements. James Kettner has shown that the citizenship created by the Revolution was grounded in what he calls "volitional allegiance"—consent. The liberal preoccupation with a specific kind of subjective identity—the individual as rational, self-willed, self-controlled, in short, autonomous—provided the conceptual foundation for this revolutionary theory of government. Indeed, the texts examined here were producing precisely that kind of liberal individual for a new kind of government based on consent. According to this political theory, argues Kettner, "Americans came to see that citizenship must begin with an act of individual choice. Every man had to have the right to decide whether to be a citizen or an alien."

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[24] Charles Monaghan, *The Murrays of Murray Hill* (Brooklyn, 1998), 4, 96, 103, 133; Lindley Murray, *The English Reader; or, Pieces In Prose And Poetry. . . .* (New York, 1802), 119; Carey, *School of Wisdom,* 106.

If the implications of liberal theory for women have been much examined, its impact on slaves has been less so.[25]

The liberal tendency to individualize power trapped slaves in a double bind. It erased the power relationships embedded in chattel slavery and replaced them with the fiction that each individual *chooses* slavery or freedom, thus shifting the moral burden of slavery onto the slave. By attributing moral agency to slaves—by holding them to standards of rational, autonomous subjectivity—it made slaves responsible for their condition. Even people born into slavery at some point made a choice to submit. At the very least, they could have chosen death over slavery. This liberal formulation—by not resisting, slaves had consented to their enslavement—grounded both citizenship *and* slavery in consent. Which may explain why southerners preferred the term "servant" to "slave," the former connoting an element of voluntarism. This is not to say that other justifications of slavery—those based on race, for instance, that denied slaves' humanity or consigned slaves to the status of such allegedly irrational actors as children and women—did not exist. But it may be worth asking whether the "liberal" justification was even more insidious than others in leading to contempt, rather than sympathy, for the slave. Be that as it may, the particular mix of republicanism, Protestantism, *and* liberalism in early American political discourse made this logic thinkable.[26]

Race was an integral part of this story. These meanings of virtue, agency, resistance, and autonomy became central to a racial idiom that would persist long after the abolition of slavery. Racial ideologies reinforced the view that enslaved men were unvirtuous, unmanly, and unwilling to resist. They *joined with* the American liberal-republican ideology that held virtue to be a precondition to freedom. Far from contradicting the nation's revolutionary heritage, racial stereotypes actually supported the belief that blacks were unfit for freedom. The many links between race and gender ideologies further contributed to liberal-republican ideology by contrasting the manly action associated with whites to the effeminate degeneracy associated with blacks. *Virtù,* of course, descends from the Latin *vir,* meaning man, and its correlate *virtus,* meaning manliness. Not surprisingly, therefore, the concept of virtue in its liberal, republican, and Protestant forms resonated with gender during the revolutionary and postrevolutionary periods. Antinomies of virtue such as cowardice, idleness, luxury, and dependence—abjectness, in short—were coded in both gendered terms (associated with effeminacy) and racial terms (associated with blackness). Among white women, virtue became linked to skin color, accentuating the contrast to the blackness and degradation of slaves. Black women were particularly marked by this ideology—their color and gender marking them as doubly abject. The mulatto children who populated so many southern plantations embodied yet another form of

[25] See Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship,* 173–209, esp. 208.

[26] The phrase "double bind" is from Michel Foucault quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, 1998), 5–6. This paragraph and the previous draw especially on Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison) (Paris, 1975); and Uday Singh Mehta, *The Anxiety of Freedom: Imagination and Individuality in Locke's Political Thought* (Ithaca, 1992). See also Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, 1988), 67–76; and Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 157. Thanks to J. G. A. Pocock for noting the use of the term "servant."

violence commonly inflicted on slave women, attesting to the connection between sexual domination and political subordination and attaching associations of lascivious sexuality to African American women, yet another manifestation of an ideology that made it possible to blame oppression on the oppressed.[27]

American liberal-republican ideology did, however, distinguish between slaves, both male and female, and white women. Certainly, the ideology denied women's capacity to become full citizens because of their dependence and their lack, by definition, of "manly" traits. That is hardly surprising; as numerous scholars have shown, the exclusion of women was foundational to contract theory and built into the emerging liberal nationalisms of the period, which were committed not only to liberty and equality but also to fraternity: a community of men. The individual of liberal theory and of eighteenth-century nationalism was male, not universal, and his status as public and political actor rested on the relegation of women to the private realm. Nevertheless, important differences existed between slaves and white women, for white women's dependence did not mark them as abject. In early national political discourse, virtuous womanhood was not only possible; it was a foundation of American political ideologies. Virtuous women were necessary to train future (male) citizens and thus to ensure the preservation of the Republic. As much scholarship has shown, the rhetoric of republican motherhood restricted women to the domestic sphere even as it created a space for certain forms of civic action and fostered a separate culture, at least among middle-class white women. And if it is clear that such women played only an indirect role in the Republic, as trainers of virtue in their sons, it is equally clear that there could be such a thing as a virtuous white woman. A virtuous slave was more problematic—in effect, a contradiction in terms. A slave with sufficient virtue would resist, finding either death or freedom, but never slavery.[28]

The liberal-republican ideology would be disseminated through print culture to large segments of the new nation: to its political class by speeches, pamphlets, and newspa-

[27] On the link between race and fitness to govern, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998). On the persistence of these racial views within American liberalism, see Daryl Michael Scott, *Contempt and Pity: Social Policy and the Image of the Damaged Black Psyche, 1880–1996* (Chapel Hill, 1996); and Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism* (Ithaca, 2000). On gendered virtue, see *Oxford English Dictionary,* 2d ed., s.v. "virtue"; Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley, 1984); and Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs,* 13 (Fall 1987), 37–58. On the connection between sexual and political domination, see Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York, 1986), 76–100; Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* (Oxford, 1989), 77–83. On rape and the failure of liberal theory to distinguish between domination and consent, see also Jocelynne A. Scutt, "The Standard of Consent in Rape," *New Zealand Law Journal* (Nov. 1976), 463.

[28] This paragraph relies on Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation: A Critique of Liberal Theory* (Oxford, 1985); Pateman, *Sexual Contract;* and Pateman, *Disorder of Women,* esp. 33–57, 118–40. On the relationship between individuality, agency, active citizenship, and exclusion, see Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 1–56, 163–64, 168–69; and William H. Sewell Jr., "Le Citoyen/la Citoyenne: Activity, Passivity, and the Revolutionary Concept of Citizenship," in *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture,* vol. II: *The Political Culture of the French Revolution,* ed. Colin Lucas (Oxford, 1988), 105–23. On the relationship between liberalism and feminism, see also Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York, 1999), esp. 55–80. On virtuous womanhood, the ur-text is Benjamin Rush, "On Female Education," in *Essays on Education in the Early Republic,* ed. Frederick Rudolph (Cambridge, Mass. 1965).

pers; to its religious class by sermons and religious texts; to its reading public by almanacs, magazines, novels, and histories; and perhaps most important of all, to the nation's children by school books and biographies. Let us turn to the *Columbian Orator,* compiled by Caleb Bingham, a collection of excerpted speeches, sermons, and dialogues that taught children how to read and to speak publicly while giving lessons on morality and virtue. First published in 1797, it was one of the most popular textbooks of the age, reprinted no fewer than thirty-four times by 1840. Read by hundreds of thousands of young Americans across the new nation, it sought to inculcate the liberal republicanism we have been examining. "Heavn's!" exclaims a hero from Joseph Addison's *Cato,* excerpted here as in many other early American school books. "Can a Roman senate long debate / Which of the two to choose slav'ry or death!" Cato's answer was clear.

> No, let us draw our term of freedom out . . .
> in Cato's judgment,
> A day, an hour of virtuous liberty,
> Is worth a whole eternity of bondage.

The dichotomy was stark: slavery on one side, freedom (and possible death) on the other. Cato's "virtuous liberty" joined republican and Protestant currents to associate virtue with liberty and slavery with an absence of virtue—and eternal damnation. Such lessons taught that each individual had the capacity to choose liberty over bondage.[29]

The point was repeated throughout the *Columbian Orator.* Consider a fictional dialogue between a white American and an Indian, in which the nobility of the Indian shines through in his last words, almost an echo of Cato's. "We had rather die in honorable war," the Indian tells his white interlocutor, "than live in dishonorable peace." Adding a powerful dimension to the trope of the noble savage, this dialogue employed the same meaning of virtue as Cato and the American revolutionaries. In every instance, freedom resulted from virtue—resistance to tyranny, a willingness to sacrifice life for liberty, and a refusal to live in bondage. Those qualities made a person worthy of freedom.[30]

[29] Caleb Bingham, *The Columbian Orator: Containing a Variety of Original and Selected Pieces Together with Rules, Which are Calculated to Improve Youth and Others, in the Ornamental and Useful Art of Eloquence,* ed. David Blight (1797; New York, 1998), 232–34. The same excerpt from Joseph Addison's *Cato* is reprinted in William Biglow, *The Youth's Library. A Selection of Lessons in Reading: Intended as a Sequel to 'The Child's Library'* (Salem, 1803), 208–11; J. Hamilton Moore, *The young gentleman and lady's monitor, and English teacher's assistant: being a collection of select pieces from our best modern writers. . . .* (Wilmington, 1803), 343–45. On the influence of *Cato,* see Frederic M. Litto, "Addison's Cato in the Colonies," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 23 (July 1966), 431–49; H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis, 1998), 28–29; and Albert Furtwangler, *American Silhouettes: Rhetorical Identities of the Founders* (New Haven, 1987), 72–84. On the circulation of the *Columbian Orator,* see David W. Blight, "Introduction," in Bingham, *Columbian Orator,* ed. Blight, xvii–xviii; and François Furstenberg, "Civic Texts, Slavery, and the Formation of American Nationalism" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2002), 220–26, 325–26. On honor and slavery, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); and Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery.*

[30] Bingham, *Columbian Orator,* ed. Blight, 238. See also "Speech of the Caledonian General," *ibid.*, 162–65. The trope of the noble Indian who would die before submitting to slavery seems to have been fairly common in school books of the day. See also William Johnston, *A New Introduction to Enfield's Speaker; or, A Collection of Easy Lessons, Arranged on an Improved Plan. Designed For the Use of Schools* (London, 1800), 49–50.

But what about people lacking those qualities—were they fit only for slavery? That seems to have been the message in perhaps the most interesting and complex of the book's selections, a brief drama entitled *Slaves in Barbary,* a tale of two Venetian brothers captured by Tunisian pirates and sold into slavery. Their refusal to submit to slavery brings them to the attention of the "Bashaw" of Tunis, who, moved by their virtue, sets them free. The plot line emerges at the very beginning, where the first words of Amandar, an enslaved Venetian, establish his credentials as a worthy slave. "I ask the fatal blow," he tells his captor, "to put a period to my miseries." Amandar's willingness to die rather than live in slavery proves he is too virtuous to remain enslaved; his freedom becomes inevitable. The drama repeats the message that virtue results in freedom when a group of captured sailors are sold at a slave auction, all except one sailor who refuses to submit. Teague, a fiery Irish prisoner, tells his captors that had he known the slavery that awaited him, "I would have fought ye till I died." Instantly, the bashaw takes an interest in the man, praises his "inborn virtues," and buys him in order to set him free. Once again virtue—understood as a willingness to resist enslavement, a willingness to sacrifice one's life—results in freedom.[31]

In the drama these characters are contrasted to an African American slave who makes a brief appearance. Though he is given a fairly sympathetic role, the contrast between this slave and the worthy ones could not be more striking. At the auction where Teague refuses to be sold into slavery, this "honest Negro lad" is described by the auctioneer as an excellent purchase: "He is bred to his business." Unlike Teague and Amandar, who prove their virtue by rebelling, this young man is bought for a hefty sum because, as the buyer explains, "He is trained into his business." Although the man's race is clearly a factor, what most distinguishes him from the Venetians is not an external quality such as race or religion, but his individual character. Lest this subtlety be lost on the book's young readers, a witness to the auction makes the point explicit. "Courage is a very good recommendation for a sailor, or soldier; but for a slave, I would give as much for one of your faint-hearted cowards, that you find hid in the hold in time of action, as for a dozen, who will meet you with a pistol at your head." Race factored here, but race *alone* did not justify slavery. Just the contrary: the Barbary drama attacks the hypocrisy of a drunk white American who praises liberty even as he whips his black slave. By associating whiteness with virtue and blackness with degradation, racial ideologies *united with* America's liberal-republican ideology to posit that black slaves were unworthy of freedom. Racial ideologies strengthened the association of virtue with freedom, and lack of virtue with slavery. They *buttressed,* rather than contradicting, the liberal-republican ideology of slavery and freedom.[32]

The view that slavery results from a lack of virtue or courage was made in another selection, a fictional dialogue between a master and a slave. Here again the plot is

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[31] Bingham, *Columbian Orator,* ed. Blight, 89, 100. On Barbary slavery, see especially Martha Elena Rojas, "'Insults Unpunished': Barbary Captivity, American Slaves, and the Negotiation of Liberty," *Early American Studies,* 1 (forthcoming, July/Aug. 2003). See also Paul Michel Baepler, "White Slavery in Africa: The Barbary Captivity Narrative in American Literature" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1996); and Paul Michel Baepler, ed., *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives* (Chicago, 1999).

[32] Bingham, *Columbian Orator,* ed. Blight, 100–101.

clear from the very first line, where we learn that the slave has been caught running away—for the second time. With the runaway's credentials as a worthy slave thus established by his resistance, his refusal to submit to slavery, the reader can already guess how the dialogue will end. The slave's virtue shines through not only in his bold willingness to argue with his master, not only in his repeated attempts to escape, but ultimately in his willingness to accept death rather than remain a slave. "Alas!" exclaims this worthy slave, "is a life like mine, torn from a country, friends, and all I held dear . . . worth thinking about for old age? No: the sooner it ends, the sooner I shall obtain that relief for which my soul pants." The fictional slave's choice of death over slavery made clear, the reader can hardly be surprised when he gains his freedom. Apparently, a willingness to die for freedom made even a black slave worthy of freedom. Race might correlate highly to a lack of virtue in these imaged slaves, but the relationship was not a necessary one.[33]

More than this dialogue (which left a deep mark on Frederick Douglass's thinking), another account of a virtuous slave, with a very different outcome, suggests how the liberal-republican ideology shaped meanings of American slavery and freedom. The anecdote about Quashi may be apocryphal, but its interest lies less in its accuracy than in the breadth of its circulation, which was wide indeed. The earliest publication I know of dates from a 1793 issue of the *Massachusetts Magazine.* The story was later reprinted in several textbooks, including an 1802 Mathew Carey publication entitled *The Columbian Reading Book; or, Historical Preceptor,* an 1804 antislavery book that called it a "well-attested relation"; and a school book entitled *Biographical Sketches and Interesting Anecdotes of Persons of Colour,* which was assigned in the New York African free schools, and which was apparently widely used in other schools as well.[34] The story tells of a slave named Quashi who grows up as his master's "play-fellow" and whose noble virtues promote him to plantation overseer. Falsely accused of some act, Quashi cannot bear the prospect of being whipped—his smooth skin was unbroken by whip marks—and "dread[ing] this mortal wound to his honour," runs into hiding. His master chases him through the plantation and catches him. Down they fall. After a "severe struggle," Quashi emerges victorious and, seated on his master's breast, holds "him motionless." When Quashi produces "a sharp knife," the master lies "in dreadful expectations, helpless, and shrinking into himself." At this point, however, the story takes a sudden and unexpected turn.

[33] *Ibid.,* 211. This same dialogue was printed in Nathaniel Heaton, *The Columbian Preceptor. Containing A Variety of New Pieces in Prose, Poetry, and Dialogues; with Rules for Reading. Selected From the Most Approved Authors. For the Use of Schools in the United States* (Wrentham, 1801), 39–42. See also the virtuous (and violent) resistance of John Smith, captured into Turkish slavery, who "beat out the Bashaw's brains with the threshing bat . . . [and] resolved to escape." Noah Webster, *The Little Reader's Assistant. . . .* (Hartford, 1791), 7.

[34] Mukhtar Ali Isani, "Far from 'Gambia's Golden Shore': The Black in Late Eighteenth-Century American Imaginative Literature," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 36 (July 1979), 353–72, 359n19; *The Columbian Reading Book; or, Historical Preceptor: A Collection of Authentic Histories, Anecdotes, Characters, &c. &c. . . .* (Philadelphia, 1802), 91–93; Thomas Branagan, *A Preliminary Essay, on the Oppression of the Exiled Sons of Africa. . . .* (Philadelphia, 1804), 112; A[bigail] Mott, *Biographical Sketches and Interesting Anecdotes of Persons of Colour* (New York, 1826), 162–65. Mott's book, which was subsidized by a fund established by Lindley Murray's will, was reprinted in York, England, in 1828, and in New York in 1837, 1838, 1839, 1850, 1854, 1875, 1877, and 1882. On its publication history, see James Green, "The Publishing History of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative," Slavery and Abolition,* 16 (Dec. 1995), 372, 375n23.

"Master [says Quashi], I was bred up with you from a child: I was your playmate when a boy: I have loved you as myself; your interest has been my study; I am innocent of the cause of your suspicion . . . yet you have condemned me to a punishment, of which I must ever have borne the disgraceful marks—thus only can I avoid them." With these words, he drew the knife with all his strength across his own throat, and fell down dead, without a groan, on his master, bathing him in blood.[35]

Quashi finds, not emancipation, but a bloody, self-inflicted death. Freely chosen, enacted by his own hand, this suicide affirms American liberal-republican ideology. Quashi represents that contradiction in terms, a virtuous, honorable slave. His life could end only in death or freedom, never in slavery. So Quashi proves his virtue by refusing to continue submitting to slavery. The fictional slave in the *Columbian Orator* found his freedom; Quashi found death. But both proved themselves worthy. Indeed, one might suggest that Quashi found a different freedom, embodied in the spiritual that serves as an epigraph to this essay: He went home to his lord and was free.

As these examples suggest, race reinforced the already close connections between freedom, virtue, and whiteness; slavery, sin, and blackness. But the correlations were not exact. On the one hand, some Europeans had to prove their fitness to be citizens. (A 1782 Georgia law, for instance, mandated the deportation of all Scotsmen except those "who have exerted themselves in behalf of the freedom and Independence of the United States.") On the other hand, African American slaves such as Quashi or the runaway described in the *Columbian Orator* could prove their virtue, that is, their unfitness to remain slaves. Indeed, instances of virtuous African Americans appear to have been, if not common in early American popular literature, at least not unusual. An antislavery almanac from the late 1830s graphically depicted the evils of slavery in its image of a virtuous slave who ran away and ultimately hanged himself—"that he might not again fall into the hands of his tormenter." (See figure 3.) Yet another widely reprinted book narrated the story of "several runaway Negroes"—their virtue already apparent in their attempted escape—captured and condemned to hang. The captors proved reluctant to execute the slaves, however, and offered a slave his life if he would execute his friends, but the slave "refused it: he would sooner die." "The master [then] fixed on another of his slaves to perform the office. 'Stay,' said this last, 'till I prepare myself.' He instantly retired to his hut, and cut off his wrist with an axe. Returning to his master, 'now,' said he, 'compel me, if you can, to hang my comrades.'" Perhaps the juxtaposition of such virtuous actions with the lowly condition of African American slaves explains why this gruesome story appeared in an early book of jests. Such irreconcilable contradiction—virtuous slaves—resolved itself as a form of humor. The logic was deeply self-serving, of course, for it meant that the only incontrovertible proof of virtue in a slave was death. The humor was dark indeed.[36]

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[35] *Columbian Reading Book,* 92–93.
[36] Georgia law quoted in Kettner, *Development of American Citizenship,* 216; *The Merry Fellow's Companion; or,*
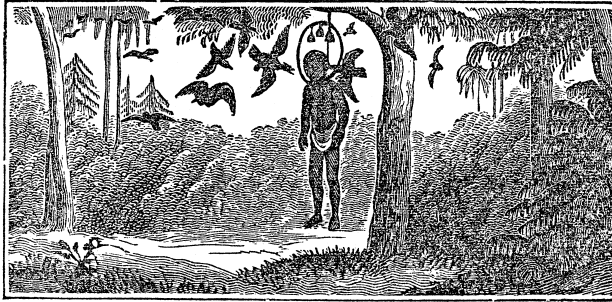
The slave Paul had suffered so much in slavery, that he chose to encounter the hardships and perils of a runaway. He exposed himself, in gloomy forests, to cold and starvation, and finally hung himself, that he might not again fall into the hands of his tormentor. [See Ball's Narrative, 2d Edit. p. 325.]

Figure 3. Antislavery propaganda disseminated images of virtuous, male slaves such as this one—his virtue evidenced by his choice of death over slavery. Such images begged a more subtle question: Could a slave who "chose" to submit to slavery be worthy of freedom? *Reprinted from N. Southard, ed.,* The American Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1838 *(Boston, vol. I, no. 3). Courtesy Brown University Library.*

The contours of this ideology should now be fairly clear. Beginning with a certain understanding of autonomy, the assumption that human agency is the motor of history, these texts defined virtue as a willingness to resist tyranny and held that people gained either freedom or slavery through individual action. Postrevolutionary Americans could thus hold that slaves had willingly consented to slavery—a matter of no small importance in a nation that grounded citizenship in consent. White Americans need not sense any contradiction between their revolutionary ideology and the persistence of slavery in their nation. By choosing to submit, slaves had proved themselves unworthy of freedom. They deserved slavery.

Slave Resistance and Proslavery Ideology

That view of freedom and slavery was neither the only one during the period, nor did it represent some existential truth about early America. It was, quite obviously, empirically unfounded, erasing important features of early American life. As generations of scholarship have shown, the diversity of social experience in early America—once the lives of women, free blacks, Indians, indentured servants, and others who lacked full autonomy are considered—collapses any simple binary between slavery and freedom. Far from representing some truth about early America, this figure of the slave who chooses slavery, thus making himself unworthy of freedom, is closer to what Slavoj Žižek calls an "ideological myth": a myth that serves both to "explain" slavery within liberal-republican ideology and "to justify present exploitation." The lack of empirical grounding is thus beside the point: This ideology existed to erase

American Jest Book: Containing A Choice Selection Of Anecdotes, Bon Mots, Jests, Repartees, Stories, &c. &c. (Harrisburg, 1797), 13–14. On honor among slaves, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s–1880s* (Chapel Hill, 2001), 3–30.

awkward facts and to overcome irreconcilable contradictions. To illustrate the point—to see the ideology erasing awkward facts—let us turn away from representations of slavery in popular media and toward some responses to actual slave resistance. Since the historiography on slavery has focused more on slave resistance than on responses to it, the conclusions will necessarily remain provisional. An initial glance, however, seems to confirm the currency of liberal-republican ideology. It informed the two most common responses to resistance: outright denial on the one hand and on the other admission that resistance made slaves worthy of freedom.[37]

Slave resistance most commonly took nonviolent forms. When one considers that only in the last thirty years have most historians come to acknowledge that theft, escape, arson, lying, shirking work, and other forms of day-to-day rebelliousness constituted acts of resistance, it should not be surprising to find that few whites in the early republic viewed them as such. America's revolutionary ideology privileged confrontation—preferably to the death. Patrick Henry, after all, had not urged Americans to resist nonviolently; he urged them to *fight.* That ideology made it easy to deny that most forms of slave resistance constituted *true* resistance. Indeed, views of slaves as lazy, deceitful, and supine merely reinforced the Sambo stereotype, strengthening the belief that slaves lacked virtue and deserved their fate. Racial ideologies further buttressed this logic; race became just one more way to explain slaves' failure to resist. Racial ideologies *joined with,* rather than contradicted, America's liberal-republican ideology.

Of course, dramatic, revolutionary slave resistance did occur, often explicitly modeled on the American Revolution, and it forced whites to confront the problem of slave resistance more directly. But just as with more mundane forms of defiance, many white commentators denied that escape and even rebellion constituted *true* resistance to slavery. If the specific strategies varied, all united in denying that slaves were agents of resistance. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger have noted as much in their study of slave runaways, who were often described as kidnapped, lured away, or otherwise manipulated by outside forces. Similar strategies inevitably attributed slave insurrection to outside influences: French revolutionaries, northern abolitionists, free blacks, providential retribution, anyone but slaves themselves. The denial of slaves' agency extended even to the most dramatic instance of slave resistance in the Atlantic world: the Haitian revolution of the 1790s. As the historian Ashli White observes, "Accounts in American newspapers . . . generally denied that the slaves were the authors of revolution. Instead, contemporary commentators looked to other groups—French republicans, colonists, and anti-slavery activists

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[37] Slavoj Žižek, "The King Is a Thing," *New Formations* (no. 13, Spring 1991), 27. Compelling parallels also exist with the theory of ideology in Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, 1981), esp. 48, 81–83. On white responses to slave resistance, see Jordan, *White over Black,* 375–402; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), 70–107; and especially Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery,* 98–107. This notion that blacks had chosen slavery over death offers a particularly cruel irony, since many enslaved Africans killed themselves rather than remain in bondage—acts that certain West African traditions (unlike Christianity) actually encouraged. See William D. Piersen, "White Cannibals, Black Martyrs: Fear, Depression, and Religious Faith as Causes of Suicide among New Slaves," *Journal of Negro History,* 62 (April 1977), 147–59. On suicide and political sovereignty, see Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 136–37.

among others—as a way to explain the uprising." Such accounts confirmed the fantasy that only outside manipulation prevented slaves from submitting to slavery, and they persisted until the very end of legalized slavery. "No attempt at insurrection in the South has ever originated from the domestic negro," insisted an anonymous southern author in 1861, "but such nefarious designs have always been fomented from other sources—such as Vesey, of St. Domingo, and Northern incendiaries."[38]

Other explanations cast resistance in terms of social deviance. A New Orleans physician believed he had discovered a new disease: "drapetomania, or the disease causing Negroes to run away." The same held for insurrection. The Haitian revolutionaries were not engaged in a manly struggle for freedom; they were "Cannibals," Thomas Jefferson wrote; they were "spurred on by the desire of plunder, carnage, and conflagration," averred the *Pennsylvania Gazette,* "and not by the spirit of liberty, as some folks pretend." The same discourse prevailed many years later in response to Nat Turner's 1831 revolt. Rebellious slaves were "deluded wretches," "mad—infatuated—deceived by some artful knaves, or stimulated by their own miscalculating passions." Newspapers described them as a "set of banditti," driven by a lust for white women—almost anything save rebels risking their lives in a fight for freedom. Instead of confirming rebellious slaves' manhood, proving that they, at least, deserved freedom, revolt revealed their depravity, even their monstrosity. "What strikes us as the most remarkable thing in this matter," opined the *Richmond Enquirer* after Turner's revolt, "is the horrible ferocity of these monsters. They remind one of a parcel of bloodthirsty wolves rushing down from the Alps." These self-serving accounts of slave insurrection were disseminated far more widely than counternarratives by slaves and others who portrayed insurrection as revolutionary resistance. Whether because of a belief that slavery had degraded its subjects or merely because of a racist double standard, the possibility that slaves might be capable of manly resistance, and therefore worthy of freedom, was rarely articulated in public. Instead, public discourse insisted that American slaves did not fight for their freedom. When alternative explanations failed, even no explanation seemed more persuasive. "What the ulterior object was, is unknown," the *Richmond Constitutional Whig* commented after Turner's revolt. "The more intelligent opinion is that they had none."[39]

Still other responses to slave insurrection affirmed slaves' innate docility. According to the historian Douglas Egerton, a myth arose after the execution of Gabriel,

[38] John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York, 1999), 250–51, 274–79; Ashli White, "The Politics of 'French Negroes' in the United States," *Historical Reflections/ Réflexions historique* (forthcoming, Spring 2003); anonymous author from *The Relation between the Races at the South* (1861), quoted in Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 142. On American responses to the Haitian revolution, see Jordan, *White over Black,* 375–86; Donald R. Hickey, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791–1806," *Journal of the Early Republic,* 2 (Winter 1982), 361–79; David Brion Davis, *Revolutions: Reflections on American Equality and Foreign Liberations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 49–54; and Chris Dixon, *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, 2000).

[39] Samuel Cartwright, *De Bow's Review* (1851), quoted in Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves,* 274; Thomas Jefferson quoted in Tim Matthewson, "Jefferson and Haiti," *Journal of Southern History,* 61 (May 1995), 217; *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), Nov. 9, 1791, quoted in White, "Politics of 'French Negroes' in the United States"; descriptions of Nat Turner quoted in Henry Irving Tragle, ed., *The Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831: A Compilation of Source Material* (Amherst, 1971), 40, 42, 37, 43, 53. The denial of slaves' desire for free-

famed leader of the Virginia slave conspiracy of 1800, that he "lost all firmness [and showed] nothing but abject fear" when he approached the scaffold. Egerton finds no evidence for this story. But evidence is beside the point. By portraying Gabriel as an antirevolutionary, "abject" in fear, too cowardly to die for his freedom, this story distinguished Gabriel and his compatriots from leaders of the American Revolution; it proved they were ultimately unworthy of freedom. Similarly, when Nat Turner was finally captured, news reports insisted that "he displayed no sort of enterprise in the attempt to escape, nor any degree of courage in resisting the person who captured him." Even more improbably, another newspaper explained how Turner was caught. Spotted by a local white, "Nat hailed him and offered to surrender. . . . The prisoner, as his captor came up, submissively laid himself on the ground and was thus securely tied—not making the least resistance!" Even Turner's months-long escape after the rebellion proved his cowardice. During that time, one newspaper claimed, Turner had "wished to give himself up, but could never summon sufficient resolution!" The *Richmond Enquirer* ultimately concluded that Turner was "a wild fanatic or a gross imposter—but without possessing a single quality of a Hero or a General—without spirit—without courage, and without sagacity." Later depictions would counter this view of Turner, portraying his capture in a heroic light. (See figure 4.) An 1870 print, for instance, showed Turner proudly approaching his captor, armed, his back firm and upright, prepared to meet his fate. In both versions—the proslavery and antislavery versions, we might call them—Turner's virtue hinges on his status as a rebel resisting slavery. Only through virtuous resistance, it would appear, would Turner truly qualify for freedom.[40]

Those responses suggest how American liberal-republican ideology shaped public discourse on slave resistance. Race was a factor here as elsewhere, making virtue possible in whites and all but impossible among blacks. But here again race joined with liberal-republican ideology rather than serving as a catchall explanation. If race were the full story, it would have been possible to justify continued enslavement on racial grounds alone: admitting that slaves resisted, but adding that they should remain slaves. Few comments did so, however. Instead, they joined racial arguments with liberal-republican ideology to deny black slaves' capacity to resist—even in the midst of insurrection! Abolitionists might (and did) counter that an apparent lack of resistance proved the degrading nature of slavery, rather than inherent docility. But that argument was ineffective and even counterproductive, for it accepted the liberal-republican ideology that associated freedom with resistance. Whether degradation was inherent to slaves or created by generations of servitude, abolitionists who emphasized the degrading nature of slavery only reinforced links between race and slavery and buttressed the belief that blacks were (or had been rendered) incapable of

dom seems to have fed fantasies of blacks' lust for white women, suggesting yet another connection between race, gender, and the liberal-republican ideology. Many people believed Gabriel's followers had intended to "take possession of the houses and white women." *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), Oct. 6, 1800, quoted in Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, 1993), 78.

[40] Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion,* 111, 219n50; *Richmond Enquirer,* Nov. 4, 1831, cited in Tragle, *Southampton Slave Revolt of 1831,* 133; *Petersburg Intelligencer,* Nov. 4, 1831, *ibid.*, 135, 136; *Richmond Enquirer,* Nov. 8, 1831, *ibid.*, 136.

Discovery of Nat Turner.

Figure 4. "Discovery of Nat Turner" from 1881. In stark contrast to descriptions of Turner's capture in the southern media, here Turner is portrayed in a heroic light: upright, armed, prepared to meet his fate. The dueling images of Turner—as cowardly fanatic or heroic rebel—both drew on cultural assumptions that equated virtue with worthiness to be free. *Reprinted from William Cullen Bryant and Sydney Howard Gay,* A Popular History of the United States, From the First Discovery of the Western Hemisphere by the Northmen, to the End of the Civil War, *vol. IV (New York, 1881).*

resisting and hence unfit for freedom. Indeed, such views may have gained currency during the nineteenth century.[41]

Not everyone denied the existence of slave resistance. Consider one analysis that not only saw slave revolt as a righteous struggle for freedom but also endorsed it. In a series of three articles published in at least five northern newspapers in late 1791, the Connecticut Republican Abraham Bishop laid out perhaps the most passionate public defense of the Haitian revolution in the United States. "We believe, that Freedom is the natural right of all rational beings," the first article began, "and we know that the Blacks have never voluntarily resigned that freedom." Bishop here combined natural rights theory with the liberal-republican ideology I have been explicating. Even

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[41] On historical scholarship denying resistance, see Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1943), 11–17. On changing views of black docility during the early nineteenth century, see Jordan, *White over Black,* 394–95.

though blacks had a "natural right" to freedom, it was necessary for Bishop to add that they had never "voluntarily resigned" that right. It is telling that Bishop felt the need to make the point at all. According to the Declaration of Independence, which Bishop invoked, were not a person's rights "unalienable"? A different revolutionary slogan, which Bishop invoked three times in a single paragraph, was more ambiguous on the matter. "*Liberty or Death*" had become the rebellious slaves' mantra, Bishop marveled. Their determined resistance gave evidence that Haitians—"sealing with their blood, *the rights of men*"—deserved their freedom. "He [God] is teaching them, as he taught you," wrote Bishop, "that freedom from the tyranny of men is to be had *only* at the price of blood. By this lesson, he instructs them, as he did you in the *value* of freedom." Even Bishop, with his radical endorsement of the Haitian revolution, ultimately suggested that "the *value* of freedom" could be learned only by active resistance—"*only* at the price of blood."[42]

African Americans commemorated the Haitian revolution with much the same language. For James T. Holly, perhaps the best-known proponent of African American emigration to Haiti, the revolution proved "the capacity of the Negro race for self-government." Holly believed in the "natural equality" of *all* people, in the "God-given liberty" of blacks. But Holly's proof lay not in a text or a declaration. Rather, it lay in Haitians' actions, in their resistance. Hence, in an 1857 speech, he celebrated Toussaint Louverture in familiar language.

> He made that bold resolution and unalterable determination, which, in ancient times, would have entitled him to be deified among the gods; that resolution was to reduce the fair Edenlike Isle of Hispaniola to a desolate waste like Sahara and suffer every black to be immolated in a manly defense of his liberty, rather than the infernal and accursed system of Negro slavery should again be established on that soil.

Toussaint here became a latter-day Cato, a Haitian Patrick Henry. "He considered it far better that his sable countrymen should be dead freemen than living slaves." Even for people who endorsed a natural right of *all* people to freedom, it was the call of liberty or death that ultimately proved slaves' virtue, their worthiness to be free. More than virtue, resistance gave slaves new life and renewed masculinity. In the Haitian revolution, Holly argued, "a nation of abject and chattel slaves arise in the terrific might of their resuscitated manhood and regenerate, redeem and disenthrall themselves."[43]

As proof of African slaves' capacity to resist—as proof of their true *manhood*—Haiti thus became a rallying cry for radical abolitionists throughout the antebellum period. Henry Highland Garnet hoped American slaves would follow the example of Toussaint Louverture. "Brethren, the time has come when you must act for yourselves," Garnet declared in a famous 1843 speech. "Let it no longer be a debatable

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[42] Tim Matthewson, "Abraham Bishop, 'the Rights of Black Men,' and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of Negro History,* 67 (Summer 1982), 150, 153, 152. Compare Bishop's articles with Trouillot, *Silencing the Past,* 80.

[43] James T. Holly, *A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government and Civilized Progress as Demonstrated by the Historical Events of the Haytian Revolution* (1857), in *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900,* ed. Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham (Tuscaloosa, 1998), 291, 289, 299, 291.

JOSEPH CINQUEZ.

The brave Congolese Chief, who prefers death to Slavery, and who now lies in Jail in Irons at New Haven Conn. awaiting his trial for daring for freedom.

SPEECH TO HIS COMRADE SLAVES AFTER MURDERING THE CAPTAIN &C. AND GETTING POSSESSION OF THE VESSEL AND CARGO

"*Brothers we have done that which we purposed, our hands are now clean for we have Striven to regain the precious heritage we received from our fathers. We have only to persevere, Where the Sun rises there is our home, our brethren, our fathers. Do not seek to defeat my orders, if so I shall sacrifice any one who would endanger the rest, when at home we will kill the Old Man, the young one shall be saved   he is kind and gave you bread, we must not kill those who give us water.*
Brothers, I am resolved that it is better to die than be a white man's slave, and I will not complain if by dying I save you. Let us be careful what we eat, that we may not be sick.   The deed is done and I need say no more."

Figure 5. Probably drawn by James or Isaac Sheffield, this 1839 lithograph depicts "Joseph Cinquez, The brave Congolese Chief, who prefers death to Slavery, and who now lies in Jail in Irons at New Haven Conn. awaiting his trial for daring for freedom." Antislavery literature praised Cinqué, leader of the 1839 revolt aboard the slave ship *Amistad,* for his virtuous resistance and his willingness to die rather than remain a slave. Such praise, ironically, promoted the idea that slavery could be reduced to a matter of individual choice. *Courtesy Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-12960 DLC.*

question whether it is better to choose *liberty or death.* . . . Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your liberties. . . . *Rather die* [*in*] *freedom than live to be slaves.*" Garnet's rousing conclusion was: "Let your motto be resistance! *resistance!* resistance!" This exaltation of resistance as proof of virtue also prevailed in response to the famous *Amistad* slave revolt. Abolitionists celebrated the revolt—and its leader, Sengbe Pieh, known in the United States as Joseph Cinqué—because of the slaves' determination to risk death and fight for their freedom. An abolitionist broadside, for instance, called Cinqué a "brave Congolese Chief, who prefers death to Slavery," and reproduced his alleged speech to his fellow slaves after they gained possession of the *Amistad.* "Brothers," said Cinqué, cast here as an African George Washington, "I am resolved that it is better to die than be a white man's slave." (See figure 5.)[44]

[44] Henry Highland Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," in *Negro Orators and Their Orations,* ed. Carter G. Woodson (New York, 1929), 154, 156–57. See also Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America,* 149, 156; Dixon, *African America and Haiti,* 61; and David Brion Davis, "Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World,* ed. David P. Geggus (Columbia, S.C., 2001), 8. On the *Amistad* revolt, see especially Sale, *Slumbering Volcano,* 58–119. For other depictions of Cinqué, see Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art,* vol. IV: *From the American Revolution to World War I,* part I: *Slaves and Liberators* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 158–61.

Even as slave owners shuddered at such rhetoric, they shared the basic principle that freedom had to be earned through resistance. When southern slave owners admitted the fact of slave resistance, they too expressed admiration. Alfred Hunt has shown that depictions of Toussaint Louverture in southern newspapers often "paid tribute to his military prowess and, in spite of his color, referred to him with the same propriety as northern newspapers did." Even the rabid fire-eater Edmund Ruffin— no abolitionist he—saw fit to call Toussaint "the only truly great man yet known of the negro race." Clearly Ruffin had a different view of race and slavery than did Holly or Garnet, which only makes their mutual admiration of Toussaint all the more startling. The same was true of Gabriel's planned rebellion a few years after the Haitian revolution. One report circulating in the South explicitly linked the rebellious slaves to the nation's founding fathers. According to a lawyer, one male slave spoke out "in a manly tone of voice" before his execution. "I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial by them," this slave allegedly declared. "I have adventured my life in endeavouring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice in their cause: and I beg, as a favour, that I may be immediately let to execution." American liberal-republican ideology infused this report. Not only was this rebellious slave portrayed as "manly," in opposition to the feminized abjectness of unworthy slaves, the report explicitly connected him to the nation's founding act of revolutionary resistance. Having risked his life fighting for freedom, this virtuous slave willingly met, and even asked for, death. Like Quashi, he was too worthy to remain enslaved.[45]

One prominent white seems to have agreed, seeing Gabriel's conspiracy as an act of resistance against tyranny. In contrast to those who denied slaves' resistance, James Monroe, then governor of Virginia, once called the rebels, not fanatical or deluded, but "bold adventurers . . . willing to hazard their lives on the experiment." Monroe's analysis echoed that of the character in the *Slaves in Barbary* drama, who said courage might be good for a sailor, but not for a slave. "It is hardly to be presumed," wrote Monroe to Jefferson, that "a rebel who avows it was his intention to assassinate his master &.ᶜ if pardoned will ever become a useful servant." For Monroe the act of rebellion made individuals unfit for slavery. Monroe further underscored this view in his angry orders to the Virginia militia called out to suppress Gabriel's rebellion. "The Chief Magistrate laments that *citizens,* called into service for the defence of their country, should dishonor that *title,*" wrote Monroe of whites caught drunk and asleep while on duty. "They ought to shew themselves worthy of the exalted condition of *freemen* in every situation in which they are placed, especially in the character of *soldiers.*" The same logic was at work in both instances: some men resisted slavery

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[45] Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America,* 85, 89; Robert Sutcliff, *Travels in Some Parts of North America, in the Years 1804, 1805, & 1806* (Philadelphia, 1812), 30. Toussaint was portrayed as a hero throughout the Atlantic world. See Seymour Drescher, "The Limits of Example," in *Impact of the Haitian Revolution,* ed. Geggus, 12; and Robin Blackburn, "The Force of Example," *ibid.*, 17. For a glowing biography that circulated in the United States, see "Toussaint L'Ouverture," in Mott, *Biographical Sketches and Interesting Anecdotes of Persons of Colour,* 65–73. The valorization of Haitian slaves made it possible for some people to believe that "French Negroes"—not American slaves—were the cause of American slave resistance, providing yet another strategy for denying slave resistance. See White, "Politics of 'French Negroes' in the United States."

and showed themselves unfit for slavery, while others ineptly defended their lives and property, raising doubts about whether they were "worthy of the exalted condition of *freemen.*" But the view of the rebellious slaves as "bold adventurers" seems to have been limited to Monroe's private correspondence. In public he too denied that slaves were true agents in the rebellion. "It seemed strange that the slaves should embark in this novel and unexampled enterprise of their own accord," Monroe declared to the Virginia General Assembly. "It was natural to suspect they were prompted to it by others who were invisible, but whose agency might be powerful."[46]

In 1816, in the wake of a plotted rebellion in Camden, South Carolina, the slave owner Henry W. DeSaussure also saw rebellious slaves, not as mad or deluded, but as heroes resisting tyranny. "They met death with the heroism of Spartans, & displayed a Spirit worthy of a better Cause," he wrote. Interestingly, DeSaussure focused on their manner of meeting death, which clearly made them unfit for slavery. Their "tone, & temper," he wrote, "was of a cast not suited, to their condition." His view of these slaves as rebels led DeSaussure to conclude that an adherence to "the principles of liberty, & a contempt of death in pursuit of it. . . . is the most dangerous state of mind for slaves." When able to admit that slaves were rebelling, even southern slave owners such as Monroe and DeSaussure interpreted rebellion in the terms of the nation's revolutionary ideology of slavery and freedom, virtue and resistance. They concluded that a willingness to risk death and resist slavery made people unfit for the condition. Slavery, according to this logic, resulted not from circumstance or misfortune and only partly from race. Above all, it resulted from the "temper" (as DeSaussure put it) of slaves, a formulation that smuggled consent into the equation, offering solid ground for the legitimacy of slavery in a republican nation.[47]

Not all Americans agreed. Alternative views of freedom and slavery existed in the early republic—antislavery and abolitionist interpretations of freedom, most prominently. Grounding themselves in the universalism of the Declaration of Independence, some abolitionists argued that slavery was simply incompatible with American freedom, no matter what the circumstances. Years of persuasion never persuaded a largely hostile public, however; the force of arms was ultimately necessary to make that view hegemonic, and even then many former slaves found their "freedom" deceptively shallow. Meanwhile, other views of American freedom continued to flourish—in particular, the belief that freedom results, not from a universal grant, but from resistance and struggle. As we have seen, that understanding of freedom and

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[46] James Monroe to John Drayton, Oct. 21, 1800, in *Writings of James Monroe,* ed. Hamilton, III, 217; Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, Sept. 15, 1800, *ibid.*, 209; "General Orders," Sept. 25, 1800, *ibid.*, 210; "To the Speakers of the General Assembly," Dec. 5, 1800, *ibid.*, 240–41. See also James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730–1810* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), 133. John Randolph believed the rebelling slaves displayed a proud "sense of their rights, [and] a contempt of danger." John Randolph to Joseph Nicholson, Sept. 26, 1800, quoted in Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion,* 102.

[47] Henry W. DeSaussure to Timothy Ford, July 9, 1816, in *The Struggle against Slavery: A History in Documents,* ed. David Waldstreicher (New York, 2001), 116. Thanks to David Waldstreicher for providing me with a copy of this document.

slavery was grounded conceptually on liberal, republican, and Protestant ideas of human agency and was powerfully authorized by a myth of the American Revolution disseminated through school books, biographies, histories, political orations, and other popular media. Perhaps as a result, the range of people who subscribed to this view of freedom and slavery was remarkably broad. So broad, in fact, that no less committed an abolitionist than Frederick Douglass shared some of its principles.

"You have seen how a man was made a slave," wrote Douglass at the midpoint of his narrative. Now, he added, summarizing its second half, "you shall see how a slave was made a man." How does the transformation occur? How does Douglass become "a man"? Staring at the ships sailing along Chesapeake Bay, Douglass determines to win his freedom or to die trying. "I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught, or get clear, I'll try it." Linking himself to the American Revolution by echoing both Addison's *Cato* and Nathan Hale, Douglass vows: "I have only one life to lose. I had as well be killed running as die standing." Thus settled on a determined act of resistance, which replicates the nation's founding act, Douglass begins the process by which a slave becomes "a man."[48]

"I resolved to fight," remembered Douglass. In fighting Edward Covey, the farmer to whom Douglass had been hired out, Douglass risks his life resisting slavery; his freedom becomes inevitable. It is the familiar plot line: resistance leads to freedom. The genius of Douglass's narrative is to show the personal, internal operation of that ideology. "This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave," observes Douglass in retrospect. "It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood." Willing to face death, Douglass proves his inner virtue; he is no longer a slave in spirit, but a man. "The gratification afforded me by the triumph [over Covey] was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself." Douglass's resistance gains its resonance from the American Revolution's gendered ideology of freedom and slavery, virtue and resistance. Connecting himself to the nation's founding fathers, Douglass proudly observed: "He can only understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery."[49]

Resistance transports Douglass from a state of social death into one of new life. By risking physical death, Douglass not only gains his masculinity; he gains social and even spiritual life. "I felt as I never felt before," Douglass recalled. "It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me." It is hard to imagine a better statement of the American revolutionary ideology of resistance, with its liberal, republican, and religious tones. In his resistance, in his

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[48] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself,* ed. David W. Blight (Boston, 1993), 75. See Albert E. Stone, "Identity and Art in Frederick Douglass's *Narrative,*" *College Language Association Journal,* 17 (Dec. 1973), 208–10. Douglass echoed Addison's *Cato:* "What a pity it is," said he, "that we can die but once to save our country." See Litto, "Addison's Cato in the Colonies," 446, 75.

[49] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* ed. Blight, 78, 79.

willingness to die rather than remain a slave, Douglass proves his virtue and gains his freedom. Douglass reinforced this message—that freedom results from virtuous struggle—throughout the *Narrative,* even in recounting his first failed attempt to escape. "In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death," said Douglass, drawing another link to revolutionary ideology. "For my part, I should prefer death to hopeless bondage." Indeed, he continued, had he and his fellow runaways not attempted this escape, "we had as well fold our arms, sit down, and acknowledge ourselves *fit only to be slaves.*"[50]

When one recalls that Douglass learned to read from the *Columbian Orator* and acknowledges the highly crafted nature of his narrative, the plot's generic elements should hardly surprise. Immersed in the liberal republicanism of the postrevolutionary United States, written to appeal to a broad audience, Douglass's *Narrative* necessarily employs the liberal, republican, and Protestant ideologies popularized by such compilers of school books as Caleb Bingham and Lindley Murray. Nevertheless, Douglass's stance in these passages—in particular, his belief that freedom results from resistance and determination to accept death rather than remain in slavery—is astonishing when one considers its implications. According to Douglass, a refusal to risk their lives would have made him and his friends "fit only to be slaves." Did this same logic apply to other slaves? Were all slaves, no matter what their situation—no matter the circumstances that distinguished urban slavery in Baltimore from rural slavery in the Carolina lowlands or the Alabama black belt—were all slaves who did not resist "fit only to be slaves"?

The Unworthy Character of America's Civic Traditions

John C. Calhoun had an answer to that question. But his answer did not contradict the nation's revolutionary ideology. Just the contrary; the power of Calhoun's argument—and here I use his argument to represent a larger strand of proslavery ideology—stemmed from its roots in American liberal-republican ideology.

In an 1848 speech denouncing the Wilmot Proviso, which would have barred slavery from land acquired in the Mexican War, Calhoun invoked America's revolutionary ideology in urging resistance to northern tyranny. "I turn now to my friends of the South," said Calhoun, "and ask, what are you prepared to do? . . . are you prepared to sink down into a state of acknowledged inferiority; to be stripped of your dignity of equals among equals, and be deprived of your equality of rights in this federal partnership of States?" This echo of Addison's *Cato* might well have been learned from Bingham's *Columbian Orator.* The message was identical: a failure to resist tyranny indicated a lack of virtue; it showed that one deserved slavery. "If so," Calhoun added, "you are wo[e]fully degenerated from your sires, and will *well deserve* to change condition with your slaves." "The South must rise up," urged Calhoun, "and bravely defend herself, or sink down into base and acknowledged inferiority."[51]

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[50] *Ibid.*, 79, 86, 87. Emphasis added. The term "social death" is from Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death.*

[51] John C. Calhoun, "Speech on the Oregon Bill," June 27, 1848, in *The Papers of John C. Calhoun,* ed. Clyde N. Wilson and Shirley Bright Cook (27 vols., Columbia, S.C., 1999–2003), XXV, 531–32. Emphasis added. See

But Calhoun did not stop there; he went on to offer his own interpretation of the meaning of American freedom. Looking back to the Declaration of Independence, Calhoun attacked the "hypothetical truism" that "all men are born free and equal" and offered an alternative.

> Instead, then, of all men having the same right to liberty and equality, as is claimed by those who hold that they are all born free and equal, [declared Calhoun from the floor of the U.S. Senate,] liberty is the noble and highest reward bestowed on mental and moral development, combined with favorable circumstances. Instead, then, of liberty and equality being born with man; instead of all men and all classes and descriptions being equally entitled to them, they are high prizes to be won . . . the most difficult to be preserved.

Attacking the abolitionist view that liberty is a natural and inherent right, Calhoun posited a more complicated definition. But it is one that, as we have seen, descended directly from the liberal republicanism of the American Revolution. Locating individual action as the determinant of freedom, Calhoun distinguished between people worthy of freedom and those unworthy of it. Like the authors of texts in the *Columbian Orator* and so many other school books—even like Frederick Douglass?—Calhoun believed that liberty can exist only among people who have shown "their fitness either to acquire or maintain liberty."[52]

If it is not surprising to find Calhoun and his peers making such arguments, it *is* surprising to find them advanced by people who had little else in common with Calhoun—and Douglass is not the only one. None other than the abolitionist Wendell Phillips once wrote that "the Slave who does not write his own merit in the catalogue of insurrections hardly deserves freedom. . . . no slave proves his manhood, except those who rise and at least try to cut their masters' throat." And consider:

> The man who would not fight . . . to be delivered from the most wretched, abject, and servile slavery, that ever a people was afflicted with since the foundation of the world, to the present day—ought to be kept with all of his children or family, in slavery.

Those were not the words of Calhoun or Thomas Roderick Dew or George Fitzhugh or any other proslavery theorist. They were the words of the antislavery firebrand David Walker, written in his famous *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* of 1829. Urging his African American countrymen to rise up against slavery, Walker employed American revolutionary ideology to advance his case. Imbued with Protestant millennialism, intentionally echoing the Declaration of Independence—steeped, in short, in American political traditions—the language of Walker's *Appeal* implied that only men could qualify as virtuous slaves and asserted that an unwillingness to fight made people fit for slavery.[53]

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also Ericson, *Debate over Slavery,* 20–21.
    [52] Calhoun, "Speech on the Oregon Bill," 534, 537.
    [53] Wendell Phillips quoted in Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore, 1976), 28; Peter P. Hinks, ed., *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (University Park, 2000), 14–15. See also *ibid.*, 16, 28, 31; and Sale, *Slumbering Volcano,* 53–54.

THE ESCAPED SLAVE.—PHOTOGRAPHED BY T. B. BISHOP.—[SEE PAGE 422.]   THE ESCAPED SLAVE IN THE UNION ARMY.—[SEE PAGE 422.]

Figure 6. From photographs by T. B. Bishop, these images of "the escaped slave" and "the escaped slave in the Union Army" appeared in *Harper's Weekly* during the Civil War. Anti-slavery literature continually emphasized slaves' virtue and agency: their willingness to run away from slavery and to fight for their freedom. If slaves could make good soldiers, as these images in the northern press suggested, they must be worthy of freedom. *Reprinted from* Harper's Weekly, *July 2, 1864. In the original, "the escaped slave" appears above "the escaped slave in the Union Army."*

The point here is not that Walker or Phillips or Douglass held the same opinions about slavery and freedom as Calhoun. Rather, it is that the same liberal-republican ideology infused the rhetoric of figures who differed so widely in every other respect. It informed northern views of slavery right into the Civil War, as testified by the widely disseminated images of former slaves turned into soldiers. (See figure 6.) If slaves could become soldiers, such images suggested, they really *would* deserve their freedom. And the same ideology shaped the southern rhetoric of secession. Thus it seems not strange but apposite that in 1861 white southerners formed a new nation—in which their right to hold slaves would be forever guaranteed—because they themselves feared becoming enslaved. For them, as for their revolutionary fore-bears, the path to freedom lay through resistance. It was a path that southern whites persisted, until the very last days of legal slavery, in closing off to their slaves. As the Confederate military situation grew increasingly desperate in 1864, some people began to consider the unthinkable (and, one might add, illogical): arming slaves to fight for the South's freedom. Not surprisingly, opposition to the idea was stiff, and it stemmed from the basic conceptualization of slavery and freedom. "If slaves will

make good soldiers," the *Charleston Mercury* observed, "our whole theory of slavery is wrong."[54]

All of this is not to suggest that the American Revolution left an unambiguously pro-slavery legacy. It would take extraordinary blinders to ignore the liberating possibilities embedded in America's political traditions. Indeed, one of the best-known features of American history is the creative and liberating use to which marginalized and outcast groups put American political traditions in expanding the scope of the nation's civic and political life. If, however, this argument has seemed to suggest that race was not a central feature of early American life or that racial ideologies did not play a central role in justifying slavery, that has hardly been its intention either. In highlighting liberal-republican ideology, it has been impossible to do justice to the many other ideologies—racial, gendered, religious, and other—that intertwined with liberal-republican ideology to shape early American political discourse. That ideology is part of a larger story—far beyond the scope of a single book or article—involving race, slavery, colonialism, emancipation, and nation building in the broader Atlantic world. However, in bracketing race, this article may have revealed a potential drawback of recent studies that emphasize the centrality of racism to American civic life. Focusing too exclusively on race may, paradoxically, absolve other elements of American political traditions from responsibility for the exclusion and oppression that have characterized much of American history.[55]

In this respect, the argument presented here may carry implications for current debates about the American liberal tradition. In his magisterial account of early American political culture, Rogers M. Smith succeeded, more completely than any scholar I have read, in locating both exclusionary *and* inclusive practices at the center of U.S. political traditions. Even as he does so, however, he perpetuates a view of liberalism as separate from—and even "logically inconsistent" with—racism and exclusion. Exclusionary practices, he argues, pose a "contradiction to liberal democratic dictates."[56] The same view underpins many recent works of early American history,

[54] Quoted in James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, 1988), 835. See also William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816–1836* (New York, 1965), 3, 234–35, 248–49; Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen,* 141; and Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism,* 14.

[55] For the argument that "racial oppression and white-supremacism have indeed been the dominant feature, the parametric constant, of United States history," see Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (2 vols., New York, 1994–1997), II, 256.

[56] Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 470, 18. See also Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *American Political Science Review,* 87 (Sept. 1993), 556; Jacqueline Stevens, "Beyond Tocqueville, Please!: Comment," *ibid.*, 89 (Dec. 1995), 987–90; Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Please!: Response," *ibid.*, 990–95; Ira Katznelson, review of *Civic Ideals* by Rogers M. Smith, *Political Theory,* 27 (Aug. 1999), 565–70; and Carol Horton, "Liberal Equality and the Civic Subject: Identity and Citizenship in Reconstruction America," in *The Liberal Tradition in American Politics: Reassessing the Legacy of American Liberalism,* ed. David F. Ericson and Louisa Bertch Green (New York, 1999). See also Mark Hulliung, "Republicanism, Liberalism, Illiberalism: An American Debate in French Translation," *Tocqueville Review / La Revue Tocqueville,* 21 (2000), 109–32. Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond the Liberal-Republican Debate: A Response to Mark Hulliung," *ibid.*, 133–40.

all widely read, which hold that slavery, racism, and exclusion have represented a paradox, a problem, or a contradiction to America's liberal democratic tradition.[57]

This essay offers a different perspective. It has shown that one meaning of liberty in early American political discourse, fusing liberal, republican, and Protestant discourses, could *itself* legitimate slavery. It has argued, moreover, that overlapping ideologies of race and gender ascription contained logical and coherent links to this liberal-republican ideology. It has thus suggested that the liberating elements of American political traditions connected to—may have been inseparable from—their oppressive aspects. Indeed, if the analysis here presented is correct, one would have to conclude that in early American political discourse, the virtues of liberty were also its vices.

[57] For recent examples by eminent historians, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 186–87; Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), esp. 241–44; and Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York, 2000), 4, 17, 89, 103.