Slaves in Algiers: Race, Republican Genealogies, and the Global Stage

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1. Introduction: Early American Literature and the Global Market

The prologue to Susanna Rowson’s 1794 play Slaves in Algiers announces that, “tho’ a woman,” Rowson will “plead the rights of man” (9).1 Her play, first staged at the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia, explicitly argues for the inclusion of women as rights-bearing subjects in the new nation. Yet given her announced focus on political subjectivity in the US, it is striking that the entirety of the play takes place on North African, rather than North American, soil. Rowson’s play thus turns to a distinctly global geography to establish the terms of national political identity. Indeed, her play—which takes as its topic the plight of white Americans held as slaves by Algerians (or “Barbary pirates”) in the 1790s—might be seen as a hawkish dramatic preamble to the Tripolitan War of 1801–05, a war that marked the US’s military debut as a global, naval power.2 In what follows, I argue that Rowson’s attempt to transgender freedom in the new nation is intimately related to a set of global relations that are too often seen as irrelevant to early American literature. Moreover, while globalization is the oft-cited paradigm of the current moment—a paradigm understood to denote the move toward a postnational geopolitical organization—I argue that earlier historical modes of globalization are closely associated with nationalist development rather than antithetical or irrelevant to it.3 Literary criticism has tended to locate the origins of American literature in an Emersonian severing of ties with Europe and the cultivation of indigenous production within an enclosed American field, yet Rowson’s play reveals an early national culture operating within a set of global relations and indicates the way in which the “national” imaginary depends upon peoples beyond the enclosure it seeks to make immanent.
In the reading of Rowson’s play and the first American “hostage crisis” of the 1790s that follows, I pursue two broadly interrelated claims: first, that race emerges as an aspect of gender construction within republican and nationalist politics in the early US and, second, that the creation of new forms of nationalized (and racialized) identity occurs in a global-transatlantic context rather than a solely national one. The early national period is typically described in terms of the growing factional division between Federalists and Republicans that pitted a vision of a strong national government ruled by a social and economic elite against the Jeffersonian-Republican ideal of state-centered, agrarian democracy. Yet, as Rogers Smith has argued, much of the vitriolic debate between Federalists and Republicans concerns not just federal versus state authority but rather the pressing question of how to configure terms of belonging in the new nation (“Constructing” 20). Struggles to define who constituted “the people” motivated much of the political debate of the 1790s, including immigration and naturalization policy, debates over laws concerning expatriation, shifts in franchise eligibility, and the controversial Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798. Moreover, citizenship began to be increasingly cast in terms of race, gender, and natality during this period—namely in ascriptive or inflexible terms that identified individuals in relation to apparently immutable characteristics: “Ascriptive versions of ‘Americanism’ offered a more compelling sense of common identity than secularized, deracinated conceptions of American political communities as merely the contingent creations of people attracted to liberal republicanism” (Smith, “Constructing” 20–21). As Smith suggests, racialization in this period is less aimed at identifying the Other as different and therefore undesirable than at creating a broad national coherence out of a group of individuals with primarily local attachments.4

In the midst of the debates between Federalists and Republicans, an enormous amount of public attention turned to the Barbary captivity crisis in which more than 100 American sailors were captured by Algerian corsairs in 1793 (Wilson 140).5 While the fledgling federal government deliberated as to how to respond, many American citizens reacted with outrage, forming societies to raise funds for ransom and to urge federal action against the Algerians. Thousands of individuals organized and donated funds, wrote letters to the president, and petitioned Congress to aid the hostages; over 100 editions of a wide variety of autobiographical, fictional, and dramatic Barbary captivity narratives were printed and performed in America between the 1790s and the mid-1800s (Baepler 24).6 Rowson’s play thus emblematizes widespread public concern with the fate of the hostages—a concern that cut across divisive party lines. In some respects, the turn to North Africa might appear to be diversionary;
Jared Gardner argues that the conflict with Barbary pirates enabled Americans to overlook the increasingly tense divisions between Republicans and Federalists: “All sides could unite in abhorring the pirates, and Federalists and Republicans alike used the cause to unify Congress and the public in support of the establishment of a navy. . . . At a time when the nation had much more serious threats to confront, the Algerian captive and the exotic, ‘oriental’ background of this first American ‘war’ united the nation in outrage and indignation” (32–33). The more serious problems to which Gardner refers concerned the internal stability of the nation, but that stability, I would argue, was closely related to the status of the nation in the world and to the terms used by the nation to construct and secure its identity and authority both internally and externally.

As Peter and Nicholas Onuf demonstrate, the definitions of national belonging under debate had a great deal to do with structuring international relations at the time as well. For Jefferson in particular, creating a strong internal union among the states was crucial to enabling the US to operate as a sovereign power at the international level: “The creation of a more perfect union [according to Jefferson] should have enabled the American states to secure their fair share of the world’s trade. That trade in turn guaranteed the strength and independence of the union” (Onuf and Onuf 159). The terms of the “more perfect union” of the states were the subject of intense Federalist and Republican debate, but were equally at stake in foreign policy debates, such as that over the Jay Treaty, that concerned US authority on the world stage. As I argue below, Immanuel Wallerstein’s model of a global economy in this period usefully demonstrates the stakes of American “freedom,” particularly economic freedom, for nascent nationalism. The Tripolitan War and the discursive constructions of race and nationality advanced in Barbary captivity narratives evoke questions of national coherence related to remapping the globe in light of the American shift from colony to nation. Rowson’s turn to North Africa indicates how national citizenship and the dynamics of race and gender were shaped in relation to a transatlantic economy linked to a broader international world in which race was an operative term as well.

In the field of American literature, Rowson is primarily known as the author of the first best-selling novel in the US, *Charlotte Temple*. Published in 1794, the novel tells the tale of a young British woman seduced by a soldier who promises to marry her if she travels with him to America; once in America, Charlotte’s suitor abandons her while she is pregnant and leaves her to die in childbirth. In *Slaves in Algiers*, however, Rowson presents a text that serves, in many respects, as an anti-*Charlotte Temple*. Rather than describing the death of a daughter in America who abandons her parents (as in
Charlotte Temple), Slaves in Algiers portrays the birth of an American daughter who discovers her parents. Rather than a domestic, sentimental tragedy, Slaves in Algiers is a comic opera that argues for the public and political, rather than private and domestic, role of women. And finally, rather than focusing on a binary British-American transatlantic world, Slaves in Algiers turns to an alternative transatlantic space, namely Africa, as a key location for understanding early national gender and politics. Rowson’s play narrates a movement across oceans that is about commerce, not colonial settlement: whereas the cultural link between England and the early national US is implicitly understood as genealogical, the link between the US and North Africa concerns access to markets and protecting American shipping interests in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Focusing on Slaves in Algiers as an exemplary early American text alters a vision of literature of the period as primarily concerned with protecting American political and sexual “virtue” from British assault. While Rowson was a member of an acting company in Philadelphia (from 1793 to 1796), she wrote a number of plays, in addition to Slaves in Algiers, that have not survived, including The Female Patriot, The American Tar, and The Volunteers. In an extant song titled “America, Commerce, and Freedom,” Rowson has sailors cheer their itinerant life in the name of nationalism, free trade, and political liberty. That Rowson so clearly linked these three terms and associated them with American shipping interests across the globe indicates an interest in matters far beyond the domestic as well as an understanding of structural links between the domestic and the wider world.

2. Gender, Drama, and Politics

As the prologue to Slaves in Algiers states, Rowson has “boldly” chosen the subject of liberty for her play and is committed to pleading the patriotic cause—the rights of man—despite being a woman. In the epilogue, in which Rowson appears on stage in her own persona, she expounds upon her concern with women’s authority (“Women were born for universal sway” [77]), thus framing the play from start to finish in overtly political terms. What, precisely, are the rights of woman that concern Rowson? She does not, for instance, seem to be making an argument for women’s suffrage in the play. Indeed, the language of equality that she invokes in framing the play seems at odds with the domestic norms of the comedy enacted within it. What, then, does Rowson imagine as the substance of women’s freedom? Rowson articulates her claims to liberty in terms of the de rigueur language of republican liberty spouted in American theaters in the period—a language intended to deflect
criticism of the theater itself, which was often viewed as a symbol of British culture and associated with luxury, corruption, and lack of fiscal and moral control. The prologue to *Slaves in Algiers* thus repeatedly rings the patriotic chimes of “glorious liberty” as well as “virtue,” but it also shifts the meanings of these words in order to give Rowson the authority to speak on stage as a virtuous woman:

Tonight our author boldly dares to choose,
This glorious subject [liberty] for her humble muse;
She dreads no check, nor persecution here;
Where safe asylums every virtue guard,
And every talent meets its just reward. (8)

A sleight of hand is evident in this treatment of liberty. The prologue begins by speaking of American men—patriots who “help’d to gain, / a nation’s freedom”—now held in “galling chain” by the Barbary pirates in North Africa (8). Rowson thus initially plays on the currency of the hostage crisis to introduce her concern with liberty. The liberty spoken of in this context is nonetheless doubly signified, first evoked as the liberty of America from England (that gained by the efforts of “patriots”) and then deployed as the liberty that should be granted to American captives in North Africa. By the final lines of the prologue, however, this liberty would seem to describe gender equality—a liberty that allows women to speak in public and that allows women’s words to be given public value.

The prologue thus uses the term *freedom* in a layered, over-determined fashion. We might schematically separate out the three instances of freedom to which the prologue refers as follows: the freedom of America from England might be understood as a *national* freedom, the freedom of the slave from the Algerian captor as a *personal* freedom with international political and economic overtones, and the freedom of women to speak in public as a *social* freedom occurring inside of the nation-state. As is evident from this fuzzy taxonomy, it is difficult to sort out the personal from the political in these uses of the term *freedom*. Layering these versions of freedom upon one another makes it even more difficult to do so, and indeed this would seem to be the strategic point of the prologue and much of the play as well. Although each of these freedoms looks increasingly less abstract, more personal, and more limited to specific individuals, placing all three next to one another not only accords women the freedom to speak in public but it presents this freedom as of a piece with the republican liberty the nation achieved in the Revolutionary War.
The prologue thus defends Rowson’s American political credentials as well as her credentials as a woman speaking in a public, political venue. These credentials were not, by presumption, granted to her by her audience; rather, she had to construct them in order to make any claim upon this score. Abigail Adams’s famous request to her husband John to “remember the ladies” while crafting the new political order met with ridicule from the future president (121), yet women continued to assert their presence as political actors in the 1790s, searching in a variety of ways to legitimate their claims to participate as members of the “people” of the new nation. Politically, Rowson’s play works to carefully stake a claim for women’s public role through insisting upon a feminized virtue associated with this position. Although the play itself assumes no overt position with respect to the Federalist/Republican divide, it was nonetheless attacked by prominent Federalist William Cobbett, and championed by Republican Senator John Swanwick. In his critique of *Slaves in Algiers*, Cobbett seizes upon Rowson’s feminist claims, adumbrating a nightmare of disorder following the dissemination of Rowson’s ideas. First, he imagines, the word *obey* will be removed from the marriage service; next, marriage itself will go by the board; and then, “Who knows but our present house of Representatives, for instance, may be succeeded by members of the other sex?”—members of the other sex who, he continues, might happen to be with child and “should even lie in, during the sessions” (24). Although Rowson’s play makes no mention of such an agenda, Cobbett clearly imagines that women’s participation on the stage will lead to the demise of male authority and the breakdown of a political and social order that can only be sustained by a strict logic of gender difference. However, when the prologue describes America as the place “[w]here safe asylums every virtue guard,” it implies that accusing her of a lack of virtue for her appearance in public amounts to a betrayal of America’s republican commitment to virtue. *Virtue*, like *liberty*, thus functions as a switchword (a Barthesian “shifter”), referring at once to national, political identity and to Rowson’s personal, gendered status. Rowson’s use of virtue insists upon the lack of significance of the divide between private and public, upon a republican politics in which the personal is the political. The feminism of her claims thus consists less in urging women to abandon a domestic role in favor of entering a public, political sphere, than in rendering the distinction between public and private spheres politically irrelevant.

When Cobbett attacks Rowson’s feminism and associates the lack of boundaries between male and female with lack of political order, he paints her with the same language he uses to attack Republican licentiousness and immorality, indicating that Republicanism
countenances feminism in a way that Federalism does not. Yet a number of historians have recently suggested that Federalists may have had more tolerance for political activity by women than did Republicans. In “Making Gender in the Early Republic,” a discussion of the Federalist writer Judith Sargent Murray, for instance, Jeanne Boydston indicates that the elitism of Federalist politics was hospitable to a privileged white woman such as Murray. Because Federalists believed that an upper echelon should lead the nation, they could countenance (at times) the inclusion of elite women within this group of political agents. Republicans, in turn, decried hierarchies of class and property ownership, arguing for a more inclusive and democratic polity. Ultimately, however, the expansion of political rights, for Republicans, obtained only for white men and occurred at the expense of white women and persons of color. Thus, as franchise requirements loosened over the decade of the 1790s and into the early nineteenth century with respect to property ownership, they were also restricted in terms of race and class: some white women and African Americans who could vote in the early 1790s no longer could after the “Republican Revolution” of 1800. As Republican views of womanhood (associated with domesticity and Republican motherhood) gained ground, whiteness (rather than social status or property ownership) became an increasingly important component of white women’s political authority. Boydston, for instance, argues that “[u]ltimately . . . white women struggling for new grounds upon which to legitimate their identities as members of the respectable classes, would actively police those boundaries of [political] qualification” (242). In other words, in response to Republican configurations of national belonging, a white woman such as Murray might establish her political fitness through defining whiteness as a qualification for American citizenship. In *Slaves in Algiers*, Rowson follows a similar strategy, as I argue below—one that is not Republican per se but seeks to ward off Federalist critiques of Republican licentiousness (with a language of feminized virtue) and deploys a Republican privileging of whiteness as a means of creating a genealogical identity for American women that endows them with political liberty.

3. Republican Genealogies

In the opening lines of *Slaves in Algiers*, Rowson presents a woman who, like Rowson herself, chooses liberty as her muse. Fetnah is a young woman who has been sold into the harem of the Dey of Algiers, Muley Moloc, and, rather than being pleased with her induction into a world of wealth and nobility, she longs instead
for release from her “cage” (13). She objects to the “old and ugly” Muley Moloc and seeks freedom from male sexual control (14). On the one hand, this freedom does not seem to be of a political order; Fetnah does not seek, for instance, a new form of republican government in Algeria. Instead, she seeks to escape from the walls of a harem that enclose her on the basis of her sexed and gendered identity. On the other hand, as we have seen already, Rowson makes the distinction between political freedom and personal freedom (here, sexual) difficult to draw. Fetnah argues that her objection to confinement and/or Algerian men (for they are importantly the same) has its roots in political terms: her love of freedom is the result of the tutelage of an American captive, Rebecca, whom her father holds as a slave: “It was she who nourished in my mind the love of liberty, and taught me, woman was never formed to be the abject slave of man. Nature made us equal with them, and gave us the power to render ourselves superior” (16). Freedom, for Fetnah, is thus both identified with an American political ideal and with an escape from gendered forms of oppression.

Rebecca, too, pines for her American liberty, but she does so in a way that rejects sexuality as the primary referent for women’s freedom. She begins by likening her plight to that of her son, Augustus, who is also being held as a captive: “My dear Augustus . . . Must a boy born in Columbia, claiming liberty as his birth-right, pass all his days in slavery.—How often have I gazed upon his face, and fancied I could trace his father’s features. . . . Must I no more behold his eyes beaming with youthful ardor, when I have told him, how his brave countrymen purchased their freedom with their blood . . . to think that we are slaves” (18). Augustus’s masculine freedom is described as an American birthright, grounded in the military actions of the patriots who fought against the British in the Revolutionary War. When Rebecca speaks in one breath of “his father’s features” and the “brave countrymen” who fought for independence, she implies that Augustus’s father has genetically imbued him with American political ideals. Rebecca’s evocation of this birthright, and her switch in pronouns over the course of the passage—from “him” to “we”—imputes the same masculine, military, national right of freedom to herself and to her son.

Rebecca’s captor, Ben Hassan, nonetheless makes sexual advances toward her within the next few lines of the play. Hassan tells her that he plans to marry her but she is able to deflect these advances by invoking political ideals. She initially tells Hassan that he cannot marry her because he is already married, but he in response deploys “liberty” as a switchword: “[O]ur law gives us great many vives. [sic]—our law gives liberty in love; you are an American and you must love liberty” (21). Hassan collapses sexual
and political realms with a semantic play on the republican term *liberty* rather than *virtue*. In doing so, he brings attention to the danger that Federalists such as Cobbett found in the politics of republicanism: a lack of control among those most unable to control themselves, including women. Indeed, the rhetoric of republican virtue aims at countering precisely this anxiety: a free people must also be capable of self-control and virtuous behavior. Rebecca thus responds to Hassan by insisting on the political meaning of her language: “Prostitute not the sacred word [*liberty*] by applying it to licentiousness; the sons and daughters of liberty, take justice, truth, and mercy, for their leaders, when they list under her glorious banners” (21). Hassan ceases his attempts to exert sexual control over Rebecca at this point, indicating the success of her defense. Although Rebecca initially imagines her patriotism as masculine, along the model of Augustus, Hassan’s sexual advances enable this patriotism to become the property of “sons and daughters of liberty” alike.

Yet Rowson’s staging of the virtuous (female) American’s defense against corrupt seduction contains a key term that is strikingly different from the Americanized allegory of Clarissa Harlowe’s battle to maintain her virtue: in Rowson’s staging, Rebecca is not defending herself against corruption by an Anglo-American rake but against a racialized, un-American miscreant. Hassan has a particularly murky cultural and racial identity: he is a Jew, originally from England, who has converted to Islam in Algeria. Moreover, Hassan clearly stands as the most reprehensible character in the play, more so, in fact, than the despotic Muley Molec. In a song later in the play, we learn that Hassan fled England to avoid the legal consequences of a career of petty crime and forgery:

> So, having cheated the Gentiles, as Moses commanded,  
> Oh! I began to tremble at every gibbet that I saw;  
> But I got on board a ship, and here was safely landed. (24)

He has converted to Islam, he explains, for reasons of convenience. Hassan is thus marked in the play by his dialect, polygamy, licentiousness, deceitfulness, and, most particularly, his commitment to commerce above the ties of family (he sold his daughter, Fetnah, into the harem), religion, and nationalism. Although liberty is presented by Rowson in an overdetermined fashion, so too is its political opposite: Hassan is exceptionable on political, religious, moral, and racial terms. Thus Rebecca’s resistance seems heroic, but her capacity to assert a transgendered American freedom relies upon the certainty with which her audience can racially identify Hassan as an utterly unthinkable sexual partner for Rebecca.
Hassan’s Jewishness raises some questions about the issue of racialization in the play. In the colonial period, anti-Semitism was often framed in religious rather than racial terms. This attitude persisted in the early national period. Some argued that Jews and Turks, for instance, should not be allowed to hold office in the US based on a concern with founding a Christian nation. Yet religion did not ultimately figure in the legal terms of American citizenship whereas race did: in the first Naturalization Act of 1790, citizenship was explicitly limited to “free white persons” without mention of religious affiliation. As with other racial and religious groups, Jews were the subject of Federalist suspicion and anti-Semitism entered into debates over citizenship. A Federalist broadside from 1800 accused the editor of Pittsburgh’s Tree of Liberty of being a Jew and thus “a mother of sedition,” and a Federalist newspaper, the Gazette of the United States, “identified Jews with treachery and treason” (Rockaway and Gutfeld 357). Here, Judaism is configured less as an anti-Christian identity than as an anti-American one. Jews were, moreover, strongly associated with Barbary pirates because of the role of prominent Jewish bankers from Algeria in negotiating the release of the captives. Shifting configurations of Jewishness thus point to a concern with linking whiteness and American identity to the exclusion of Jews as a racial and religious group. In Rowson’s play, Hassan’s willingness to place self-interest and financial concerns above those of nation and family seem to mark him, in particular, as the antithesis of American virtue, a virtue that Rowson sought to identify with a nationalist-branded commerce and liberty. In a song from Rowson’s play The American Tar, the chorus of sailors sings,

For commerce whilst the sail we spread
To cross the foaming waves boys. . . .
Boldly assert each sacred right
Be Independent, Brave & Free. . . .
Then Huzza, Huzza, Huzza for America (Weil 92)

Unlike the American boys who sail in the name of both commerce and freedom, Hassan evinces an interest in personal profit that is not linked to nationalism or to a politics of freedom, and he thus appears particularly reprehensible.

The racial identity of the “Mahomettans” or Turks of North Africa was similarly complex in the early national period. While newspapers referred to Turks as dark skinned and “black,” they more often referred to them as “tawny” and “savage” in the language used to describe Native Americans (Melish 155). Linda Colley argues that in the period prior to the 1800s, religion rather
than race is the paramount signifier of difference with respect to North Africa ("Britain and Islam"). Nabil Matar, however, notes a shift toward racialized discourse in the eighteenth century. Matar suggests that the identification of North African peoples with Native Americans was rhetorically central to a new colonizing attitude toward the former Ottoman empire that developed at the close of the eighteenth century and that was accompanied by a racial-civilizing narrative (170). In the US the 1790s mark a turn toward defining American identity in ascriptive terms, making race an increasingly important signifier of difference. A racializing logic is related both to concerns within the nation over establishing the coherence and stability of a white citizenship and to concerns with establishing American commercial authority and liberty in the larger world. Joanne Melish suggests that a central aim of the reverse captivity narrative (whites held captive by nonwhites) is to establish the “stability of whiteness” over and against environmentalist theories of the mutability of race (161). As whiteness became a more important property of American citizenship, it became necessary to affirm its constancy and soundness: Barbary captivity narratives often “proclaimed the whiteness and virtue of true republicans—northern, free, white citizens—to be innate and inherited, as was the slavishness and dependency of people of color” (161). Melish’s analysis is particularly useful in thinking about the array of racial figures presented in Rowson’s play—figures who do not clearly line up in terms of a familiar black/white racial binary. From the range of nonwhite characters presented in the play, what emerges most clearly is not the specific terms of their racial identities (as Turk, Jew, or African) but rather the fixed whiteness of American identity.

The racializing force of the play becomes clearer when we examine two additional elements: the contrast between the fates of Rebecca and Fetnah and the subplots of interracial marriage. The opening two scenes of the play, in their propinquity, liken Fetnah’s subjection to Rebecca’s and provide both characters with a republican rhetoric for escaping gendered subordination. As such, Rowson would seem to indicate that American political rhetoric will free Fetnah as well as Rebecca from sexual subjugation. Indeed, it appears initially that Rowson is intent upon pursuing this claim through the means of interracial marriage. Republican politics and freedom from gendered oppression can, on this model, cross racial lines. Following the opening scenes introducing Fetnah’s and Rebecca’s quests for freedom, a number of matches between Algerian women and white men are pursued both by the white male slaves of despotic and predatory Algerian commerce (Anglo-American men captured by pirates) and the female Algerian slaves (harem members) of sexual predation and despotism. In its concern with these
marriages, *Slaves in Algiers* would seem to be a comedy in the Shakespearean sense, committed to creating a utopian future through the devices of the marriage plot. Yet not one of the interracial couplings entertained during the course of the play results in marriage. Rather, the resolution of the play centers on the reunion of Rebecca (the American captive) with her long lost husband, Constant (a British captive), and the discovery that a third captive, Olivia, is their daughter—a true “daughter of Columbia” (72). The play thus abandons its concern with interracial marriage in favor of a plot that establishes a British-American genealogy for the republican daughter. Further, while Rebecca escapes from Hassan by wielding republican rhetoric, Fetnah’s republican rhetoric fades as she ultimately chooses to abandon her Anglo-American lover in order to care for her father, Hassan. In its sudden shift of emphasis from questions of marriage to issues of parentage and filial piety, the play’s resolution points to a quickened engagement with racial purity.

Three interracial romances are proposed and ultimately rejected within the play. When we first meet Zoriana, the Dey’s daughter, she confesses that she is in love with a Christian man: “I am a Christian in my heart, and I love a Christian slave” (28). The object of her affections, Henry, has encouraged her amorous attentions for the sake of securing her assistance in acquiring jewels and money to ransom himself, yet we learn that he is engaged to one Olivia, whom he presumes is living far from North Africa. Even though Zoriana frames her link to Henry in religious terms (she is a Christian at heart), her conversion does not unite the pair. In this instance, then, interracial romance facilitates the spread of republican ideas—Zoriana assists Henry in freeing himself and staging a revolt among the slaves—but the romance is also nipped in the bud before it enables the spread of (republican) Anglo-American genes.

The second interracial pairing is a match between Fetnah and Henry’s friend and fellow slave, Frederic. While Fetnah longs for freedom from the gendered oppression of the harem, she does not imagine freedom in terms of the masculinist, military model Rebecca invoked with respect to Augustus. Rather, Fetnah clearly understands that to escape from the harem she must ally herself sexually with an Anglo-American man. Thus, she imagines that a companionate marriage with an American will grant her a nationalized American freedom: “I do wish some dear, sweet, Christian man, would fall in love with me, break open the garden gates, and carry me off. . . . And take me to that charming place where there are no bolts and bars; no mutes and guards; no bowstrings and seymetars. — Oh! it must be a dear delightful country, where women do just what they please” (38–39). The coerciveness of sexual subjugation is
transformed here into the language of mutual love and consent. Despite Fetnah’s embrace of a republican ideal that welds political and personal freedom, Rowson clearly pokes fun at her in this passage, suggesting that Fetnah’s romantic desires have become too politically (rather than personally) scripted. This implied critique is underscored when Frederic approaches Fetnah with a similarly quixotic (though less political) agenda: “What a poor, unfortunate dog I am; last night I slipped into the garden behind Henry, in hopes I should find some distressed damsel, who wanted a knight-errant, to deliver her from captivity; and here have I wandered. . . . Some one approaches—by all that’s lovely ’tis a woman—young, and handsome too” (37). Embracing one another through the heavily scripted narratives of republicanism and romance, Fetnah and Frederic display themselves as a comical mismatch rather than a couple formed to found a utopian future.

The play’s final interracial romance is wholly farcical rather than merely comical, and the farce derives from a more exaggerated form of the quixotism from which both Frederic and Fetnah suffer. In this instance, the lowbrow comic character of Sebastian—a drunkard and dunce among the party of Anglo-American slaves plotting the uprising—is, much as Frederic, smitten by the romantic desire for the love of a foreign woman. With no Fetnah of his own on the horizon, Sebastian sets his sights on the American woman he is sent to rescue from captivity, Rebecca. The farcical romance unfolds as Hassan dresses as Rebecca (to escape the wrath of the Dey, from whom he has stolen money) and becomes the object of Sebastian’s besotted attentions. The feminized representation of Hassan indicates not only his lack of suitability for utopian marriage but his lack of fitness for the category of republican masculinity.16

Although the stories of both the second and third of the mismatched couples point to the dangers of quixotic, scripted romance, the tale of the first pair—Henry and Zoriana—also refers to the work of Miguel de Cervantes, specifically, the intercalated “Captive’s Tale” in Don Quixote (1605). In her preface to the printed edition of the play, Rowson explicitly mentions Cervantes as an inspiration. Yet there are significant differences between the marriage plots of Cervantes’s Barbary captivity tale and hers. First, Rowson’s romances between Christian and Islamic characters do not ever result in marriage. In Cervantes’s tale, the Algerian princess, Zoraida, converts to Christianity, escapes from her father’s walled palace, and marries a Christian captive whom she helps to escape as well. In citing this plot so overtly and yet changing its outcome so radically, Rowson rewrites the cross-racial marriage plot that hinged on the successful bridging of cultural difference through religious conversion. In its stead she presents a failed cross-racial
marriage plot that describes the impossibility of crossing cultural lines, now figured as racial and unalterable (ascriptive) rather than religious and mutable. Henry’s lack of interest in Zoriana is dictated by his prior engagement to Olivia; thus, while Zoriana has converted to Christianity, Henry is unable to convert to her. The second and third interracial couples (Fetnah and Frederic; Sebastian and Ben Hassan) each magnify the impossibility of interracial marriage by suggesting that such marriages rely on false (quixotic) scripts. In addition, at the close of the play, Fetnah abandons her interest in Frederic, announcing that she chooses to stay in Algeria to take care of her newly bankrupt father, Hassan. Fetnah and Frederic’s romance thus recapitulates the move away from interracial romance (a movement to break with racialized social and political boundaries) toward filial piety (a movement reinforcing the racial nature of social and political boundaries). The final match between Sebastian and Hassan represents interracial marriage in hyperbolically parodic terms: to marry across racial lines, Rowson seems to argue, is as preposterous (and ludicrous) as these two men marrying one another.

Although some language in the play suggests that religious rather than racial differences separate Christian from Islamic characters, the telling difference between the fate of Rowson’s Zoriana and Cervantes’s Zoraida indicates that a shift from religious to racial difference is important to Rowson. More evidence to this effect arrives in the surprising conclusion to the play, which focuses on parental rather than marital ties. Although Henry and Olivia are reunited (Olivia, too, is an Algerian captive), the crucial plot resolution does not turn on this reunion but on that of Olivia and her parents, Rebecca and Constant. In the final scene we see Olivia and her British father captured (together with Henry) in their attempt to escape from Muley Moloc. Moloc agrees to free Henry and Constant if Olivia will marry him; she, in turn, consents to this arrangement, planning to commit suicide as soon as her father and fiancé are free. At this point, Rebecca arrives with the ransom she has recovered from Hassan. As she attempts to ransom Olivia, she discovers that Constant is her long lost husband and Olivia her long lost daughter. Many years earlier, Rebecca had married a British soldier (Constant) against her father’s wishes and had subsequently believed him lost in battle. He had since returned to England with their daughter, Olivia, while Rebecca had given birth to their son, Augustus, in America. As Rebecca and Constant unite, she vows that they will all die rather than sacrifice Olivia’s honor. Rebecca proclaims to Moloc: “Then let your vengeance fall—we will die together; for never shall Olivia, a daughter of Columbia, and a Christian, tarnish her name by apostasy, or live the slave of a despotic tyrant” (72). Although Olivia had agreed to convert to
Islam and marry Moloc, this interracial marriage, too, is declared impossible once Olivia’s genetically American and hence politically republican identity is revealed. Moreover, just when Olivia’s Anglo-American parentage and politics are revealed, the slaves stage a successful uprising and free the Christian captives, who then urge republican government upon the surprisingly receptive Moloc. At this precise moment, Fentnah announces her desire to stay with her father rather than marry Frederic. The emotional payoff of the play is thus the reunion of the British and American parents and the production of Olivia as “a daughter of Columbia” whose natural antipathy to slavery seems to generate the freedom of the captives.

Enacting closure through the reunion of parents and child (rather than through the union of young lovers in marriage) works to shift the locus of republican political identity and agency away from prodigal acts (breaking existing cultural bounds through interracial marriage) and toward filiopiety: Olivia achieves political agency insofar as she embodies the union of British and American blood as a true daughter of Columbia. Rowson thus offers a version of American political identity for women that does not involve breaking bonds with British parental authority and that enables a republican daughter to be both virtuous and American. Rather than seeing American freedom, less than two decades after the end of the Revolutionary War, as the product of a war with Britain, Rowson describes it as the product of a union with Britain. This version of patriotism linked to filial piety strains considerably against the model of national identity described by Jay Fliegelman according to which “a call for filial autonomy . . . echoes throughout the rhetoric of the American Revolution” (3). Fliegelman argues that models of genealogical identity tended to be replaced with pedagogical ideals as, for instance, “the greater triumph of the moral preceptor over the ‘consanguineous’ parent” (50). Yet this model of autonomy applies with far greater difficulty to women than to men—particularly virtuous women—because women’s legal, sexual, political, and moral identities depended upon attachments to men. Whereas Fliegelman argues that the new American subject must effect a split from his British parents, Rowson’s female American subject must create a link with her British parents because the sexual element of her identity remains crucial to her virtue.

The contrast within the play between the political identities of the two children—Augustus and Olivia—underscores the extent to which gender fundamentally shifts the terms in which Anglo-American relations are configured for citizens of the new nation. Early in the play, Rebecca speaks of tracing Augustus’s father’s features in his face and of telling him stories about his “brave countrymen” in the Revolutionary War. This language is rendered bizarre when we learn that
Augustus’s father was British and fought against the American patriots. Yet the disjunction of this language is never quite evident because we only hear of Augustus’s birthright of freedom before we know of his British paternity. In contrast, Olivia’s birthright of American freedom tends to be confirmed rather than disrupted by her British paternity because it guarantees her chastity, virtue, and whiteness. The distinction between Augustus’s and Olivia’s relations to British parentage indicates the extent to which Fliegelman’s model of the American prodigal son requires alteration in order to be extended to the American daughter. Rather than cutting the tie to England, then, Rowson’s American daughter affirms this tie as a necessary element of her virtuous, republican identity and subtly deploys racialization as a means of legitimating both British parentage and American women’s virtue. Critics of the theater in the 1790s imagined England as the corrupt and tyrannical enemy of a fragile American people; Rowson displaces this image by describing Algerians and Jews as corrupt and tyrannical threats to American women. By racializing the threat of tyranny, English paternity is, by way of contrast, bleached and purified, and the virtuous American daughter emerges as both loyal to her English culture (genealogically pure) and to American politics (committed to freedom).

4. Race, Nation, and Globalization

Public fascination with the Barbary captivity narrative lay partially in the reversal of the racial terms of institutionalized slavery in the US. Just as the US was increasingly relying upon slave labor and debating the morality of doing so, a relatively small though significant number of white Americans were being held as slaves in North Africa. Yet the Barbary captivity narrative was concerned with more than a fantasmic reversal of the racialized terms of US slavery. It addressed the emergence of the US as a nation with global authority. While North Africans had attacked ships and enslaved sailors for hundreds of years, American ships came under particular attack in the 1790s because they were no longer covered by tribute agreements paid to North African rulers by the British. The Algerian hostage crisis and the Tripolitan War are thus important moments in early US history at which many in the US saw the nation as first challenged to assert its identity as an independent actor in the international arena.

With Slaves in Algiers Rowson is far from alone in taking up the subject of the Algerian captives as literary fodder, yet she is perhaps distinct in her failure to explicitly link the enslavement of Americans in Africa to the enslavement of Africans in America.
As I argue above, her concern with extending political subjectivity to white women leads her to implicitly construct and sustain racist assumptions rather than to combat them. Ironically, Rowson’s racializing discourse relies upon a structural dimension of the equalizing politics of republicanism. Republicanism espouses a doctrine of equality among members of the polity; as such, it would seem to be antithetical to race slavery and, more broadly, to racism. Yet the equality of members of the republic is predicated upon drawing a boundary inside of which people are equal and outside of which they are not. Schematically, we might understand the relation of race and gender in Rowson’s politics as follows: in attempting to extend to Anglo-American women the horizontal relations of equality which obtain within the republic, Rowson redraws the boundaries of the republic such that race (rather than gender) becomes a primary line of demarcation between the interior and the exterior of the republic.

In her remapping of the American “people,” moreover, Rowson relies upon territories and bodies outside of the US and England to define both a national US space and a racialized republic. Thomas Jefferson, as well, turns to geographical displacement as a means for resolving conflicts over the question of citizenship in the US republic. While condemning slavery, he also cannot imagine the integration of African Americans into the “one body” of the republic and suggests that former slaves be deported “beyond the limits of the United States”: “It will probably be asked, why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state, and thus save the expense of supplying, by importation of white settlers, the vacancies they will leave? Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race” (Notes 138). As John Saillant argues, Jefferson’s racism—his sense that blacks and whites together will never be able to achieve the homogeneity required of a unified, virtuous people—is wholly of a piece with his republicanism. For my purposes, it is also telling that Jefferson works to displace the line dividing blacks and whites (a line he locates in nature rather than in politics) from inside of the nation to a location geographically outside of it. In other words, the internal division of the American polity between blacks and whites is remapped, in the deportation plan, as a division between nations occupying separate continents. Jefferson thus relies upon a far-flung geographical mapping to sort out the internal racial divisions of the US political economy.

The racial mapping of the globe, in which both Rowson and Jefferson engage, enables the US to be identified (culturally and
politicized) as a white nation, despite the enormous numbers of African Americans and Native Americans living within its borders. Two points thus emerge. First, race is a significant aspect of the world economy, and not simply an internal issue confronted by multiracial nations such as the US. Second, the nation only constitutes itself as a political unit in the context of what Wallerstein has called the “interstate system” or the web of interconnected states participating in the expanding world economy of the late eighteenth century. Wallerstein’s analysis of the capitalist world economy is particularly useful in making this larger context visible. Wallerstein argues that a modern world economy began forming in the mid-fifteenth-century as Europeans established relations of economic dominance and interdependence (not simply trading relations) with peripheral regions beyond their own political borders. In this economy, Wallerstein argues, capitalism operates to increase profits by means of a division of labor, but a global rather than intranational one: the world capitalist economy functions by means of geographical specialization in which core areas extract the surplus value of labor from peripheral regions of the economy (*Capitalist* 18–21). The nation-state, in this analysis, does not define the boundaries of a given political and economic system but rather emerges as an element within the larger system. Drawing on this model, the US in the 1790s might be seen as attempting to move from a peripheral to a core status in the world economy.25

In making use of Wallerstein’s neo-Marxist model, I am less interested in asserting the primacy of economics than in deploying the model of a world system to theorize the workings of culture outside of the limited framework of the nation-state. Studies of literature have long taken the nation-state as the organizing horizon of the discipline; literature has been understood to be either implicitly or explicitly linked to nationhood and to the cultural work of forming national citizens.26 Yet national identity is also organized within a world economy in which culture and peoples flow across state boundaries; the relation to pressures from a larger world system helps to form the nation. In considering diplomatic and political debates concerning the Tripolitan War, it is clear that to the extent that the US fought to protect shipping interests, the war directly concerns the transition from colony to nation, or, in Wallerstein’s terms, the US transition from a peripheral to core region in the world system. At stake in this transition, quite obviously, is the ability of the US to establish commercial access to global trade routes. Yet in cultural terms, the war also concerns the racial mapping of American identity in relation to a global economy of persons. The link between the Tripolitan War and the Barbary captivity narrative, moreover, makes evident the cultural work of early national texts in
a global context. What emerges from the war is less a military or economic prize than a new language of American identity that looks forward to the US’s core status in the world economy and its subsequent imperialist presence there.

As a 1786 article in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* indicates, the threat to US shipping interests posed by Barbary pirates was understood as a threat to the identity of the nation: “The Mediterranean trade is shut to America by the depredations of the Barbary corsairs—the French and British West India islands refuse admittance to American vessels but in a very limited way—to what quarter of the world can she export her wheat, corn and lumber—to whom and where can her citizens look for some participation of the commerce of the world—Alas, not to Congress! for they have not the power to enforce any commercial treaty they may make. . . . [T]he nations of Europe too well know this, and profit by the distracted state of our councils.” This author uses the international threat to US commercial interests to advance a Federalist argument for stronger central government. As this author also indicates, US relations with North Africa are part and parcel of relations with other core nations of the world economy, namely France and England. (Jefferson, in particular, is concerned that the British are encouraging North African states to attack American ships so that the British can pick up lost US trade on the Mediterranean.) Competing for position in the seas of the Atlantic and Mediterranean involves securing relations between and among an array of peripheral and core areas. As early as 1785, when the first US ships *Polly* and *Dauphin* are captured by Algiers, Jefferson contends that the US should take military action rather than pay tribute to pirates. While Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis demand that tribute be paid to insure that US ships will not be harassed in the Mediterranean, Jefferson, among others, uses the familiar language of American liberty to argue that the US must assert its “independence” on the seas. The US should wage war, argues Jefferson’s supporter John Paul Jones, “as will make us respected as a great People who deserve to be Free” (*Jefferson, Papers* 8). A corollary to the US bid for economic power is thus the assertion of global political authority in ideological terms—typically articulated as an assertion that Americans are a free people (with uninhibited rights to global markets) or, alternatively, as an assertion that the US is a nation equal in stature to England and France (a core nation).

The US officially entered into war with Tripoli in 1801 and the war ended in 1805. US “victory” in the war involved paying $60,000 in ransom for the return of American hostages and a negotiated truce with the Bashaw of Tripoli.27 Some piracy by North African states continued in the Mediterranean after the war, although US ships were increasingly harassed by the British (rather than North
Africans) prior to the War of 1812. In military and economic terms, then, the Tripolitan War had less than dramatic results. Despite the rather uneventful outcome, the US victory over Tripoli was celebrated in the popular press of the time, as well as subsequently in historians’ accounts, in terms that emphasize a powerful American sovereign identity on a world stage. The Philadelphia *Aurora* thus reports on a celebratory dinner held in honor of one of the naval captains who fought in the war, William Bainbridge. Bainbridge, according to the article, makes the following toasts: “Peace, preferable to war—War to insult. In defence of our commerce, may our brethren lately liberated, fill the chasm in the career of their glory. . . . The once ridiculed gun boats of the United States, now converted into models for the experienced artists of Europe. . . . The states of Barbary—No longer a disgrace to the civilized world, did but an American spirit inspire the cabinets of Europe.” Bainbridge thus succinctly summarizes the logic that both supported and emerged from the (minor) war: the US is a free people with the right to liberty across the globe; the US is equal if not above the nations of Europe in both her military acumen (“gun boats”) and her enlightened morality (“American spirit”). Moreover, the US ability to spread that enlightened morality to places such as North Africa will constitute a civilizing gesture for the world. As Bainbridge suggests in his final toast, much is made of the US refusal to pay tribute to Tripoli: this “civilizing” gesture is one that insists that Tripoli function not as an antagonist to the world capitalist system but as an element within it. Ventriloquizing to a surprising degree the nationalist and Jeffersonian rhetoric of the 1800s, historian Robert Allison concludes that “[t]he victory over Tripoli . . . had made the Americans the equals of any other people, not because of military power, but because that power was guided by a spirit of justice, and its goal was not conquest but freedom. The Americans, statesmen and sailors, leaders and common fold, were different from the ‘the [sic] plundering vassals of the tyrannical Bashaw,’ as one poet had described the Tripolitans, and the European nations that countenanced the Bashaw’s plunder and tyranny” (34). While it is unclear that the US emerged with any decisive military victory, as Allison indicates, he nonetheless seems to offer evidence of what we might call a cultural coup: the Tripolitan War allowed the US to position itself, rhetorically at least, as one of the core nations of the world economy, intent upon establishing other areas as peripheral—as economically and politically backward and dependently allied with core nations.

Ironically, the rhetoric of freedom surrounding the Tripolitan War celebrates a commercial freedom to engage in an economy supported by slave labor. Many of the goods sold by the US were the product of slave labor and the carrying trade was a trade that carried
Africans into slavery in the US. Moreover, as Allison’s quotation of an unnamed poet indicates, wartime accounts portrayed Algerians as backward, tyrannical, primitive, and ultimately in need of enlightened imperialist intervention. Consul William Eaton’s description, written to the secretary of state, of an audience with the Dey of Algiers is not atypical: “Here we took off our shoes, and... were shown to a huge shaggy beast sitting on his rump... with his hind legs gathered up like a tailor, or a bear. On our approach to him, he reached out his fore paw as if to receive something to eat. Our guide explained, ‘Kiss the Dey’s hand!’ The animal seemed at the moment to be in a harmless mode; he grinned several times, but made very little noise. Having performed this ceremony, and standing a few moments in silent agony, we had leave to take our shoes and other property and leave the den, without any other injury than the humility of being obliged to violate the second commandment of God and offend common decency” (United States 1: 301). The portrayal of North Africans as subhuman and barbarous lent force to imperialist efforts (on the part of the US and other European nations) to incorporate North African states in the world economy as peripheral regions.

Although the capitalist world economy is based upon a geographical division of labor that exceeds national boundaries (or, is constituted in part by national boundaries), another terrain upon which the division of labor operates is racial. Walter Mignolo, for instance, argues that “variegated methods of labor control were tied to the first racial mapping of the modern world system” (53). Racialization is thus a key element of the capitalist world economy—one which enables, for instance, the sustained use of race slavery in the first new-world factories, plantations. More specifically, Wallerstein argues that race is related to the division between core and peripheral regions of the world system (“Construction” 306). As the rhetoric of comparison with other European states indicates, the US clearly saw the war as a bid for the “respect” and recognition of other core states; yet the war was equally concerned with establishing North African states as peripheral in relation to the core status of the US. As such, racialization was key in establishing the division between core and periphery.

While it would be difficult to argue that the Tripolitan War serves to turn the North African states into a peripheral region directly linked to a US core in any meaningful economic way, it is possible to argue that the war effects precisely this goal in literary and cultural terms. As Paul Baepler and Malini Schueller point out, many of the captivity narratives that emerged in the 1790s included meditations in the imperialist mode. Former captives Archibald Robbins, Thomas Nicholson, and James Cathcart all mused, in print, upon invading North Africa in the name of civilization. Algeria
becomes fully incorporated into the world system as a peripheral region when it is colonized by the French in 1830. Yet the US discourse around the Tripolitan War works to establish the US on one side of a racialized division of labor and Algeria on the other. The racialization of Algeria works, through narrative, to support the claim that the region is in need of what might be called peripheralization or incorporation into the world economy as a peripheral region.  

As I have argued, Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* constructs a racialized distinction between persons of Anglo-American descent and the inhabitants of Algeria. As the discourse surrounding the Tripolitan War and US nationalism in this period indicates, the racialization of North Africans is linked to an assertion of imperialist authority and ideology on the part of the US. As such, the imperialist accent of the final lines of the play should not, perhaps, catch us by surprise. At the close, as Olivia’s American and British parents unite and the Anglo-American captives are freed, Olivia proclaims: “May freedom spread her benign influence thro’ every nation, till the bright Eagle, united with the dove and olive branch, waves high, the acknowledged standard of the world” (75). If, in 1794, these words seem out of place, spoken more than 100 years before the doctrine of “benevolent assimilation” is articulated, it is perhaps because we have mistakenly seen nationhood as an affair of the nation rather than the globe. Writing her play before the Tripolitan War breaks out in full force, Rowson anticipates much of what will come to be the legacy of that military event. Voicing the apparent consensus of twentieth-century historians, Michael Kitzen writes, “The Marines, in the capture of Derne, had the distinction of being the first arm of the armed forces to raise the American flag in triumph outside the Western Hemisphere. . . . The Tripolitan War should be remembered as the encounter in which the United States asserted itself and showed the European and North African nations its budding character and perseverance” (180–81). The Barbary captivity crisis and the Tripolitan War might thus be seen as primal scenes of American imperialism, enacted on the stages of Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York in the opening years of American theater and recorded in the history books and hymns of the nation.

As the terms of American citizenship and nationhood are formed and contested in the 1790s in the volatile venue of the early American theater, Rowson redraws the boundaries of the US polity such that the public sphere includes the figure of the republican daughter. Despite the energy of Rowson’s feminist claims for women’s authority in the new republic, what emerges from the play and its context is a disturbing vision of a racialized global geography that undergirds the vision of transgendered American liberty. The logic of race will be increasingly elaborated in the nineteenth
century in scientific and legal terms. Yet, as the incipient racial logic of Rowson’s play, republican politics, and global culture and economics in the eighteenth century indicate, the foundation of the nation occurs in relation to a set of developing racialized and gendered terms. Race, gender, and nationhood, as I have argued, are tightly interrelated concepts and are defined in the eighteenth century within a world economy, not simply within the boundaries of the US or within a binary relation to England.

If there is an historical epilogue to my analysis of Slaves in Algiers, we might find it in a later theatrical event when, in 1805, seven Turkish prisoners captured in the Tripolitan War were brought to New York and displayed in the stage box of the theater. The New York Evening Post advertises the appearance of the captive Turks, who will be on display as they themselves are treated to a performance of Bluebeard in which will be featured “Abomelique on his Elephant and his train of Guards, Camels, etc.” as well as the bloodstained apartment where Blue Beard’s wives have been beheaded. A later performance is advertised as well, in which Columbus, or A World Discovered is performed for the benefit of the prisoners—“for the purposes of accommodating them with additional clothes.” As George Odell and Daniel Quirk state, “On this occasion [of the second play] the exoticism of the show became occidental: the spectacle was Columbus, and the queer people were Indians, not Moors or Turks” (2: 229). The theater here becomes the place where the American possession of Turks and Moors is staged and where these prisoners, in turn, are deliberately schooled in scenes of Turkish exoticism as well as positioned, together with Native Americans, as “queer people” inhabiting the drama of American nation formation. According to the Post, the appearance of the Turks was a runaway success: many would-be spectators were “obliged to retire for want of places” in the theater (Review). The Turkish prisoners were required to witness the staged discovery of America, literally for their own benefit. In this doubled staging—as Americans watch Turkish prisoners watch Americans playing Turks—we might note, as well, that the exotic (“queer”) figures of Turks and Moors from North Africa are not wholly exterior to early national culture but rather are called upon to play a significant role in the dramatic narrative of American nation building.

Notes
1. The prologue was spoken on stage by British actor James Fennell and presumably written by him as well; thus, the phrase “rights of man” is Fennell’s summary of Rowson’s claims in the play.
2. Rowson’s play was written shortly after the passage of the Navy Act of March 1794, which appropriated $600,000 for the creation of a US Navy in order to combat the Barbary pirates. Between 1785 and 1815, roughly 700 Americans were held captive in North Africa (Allison 107). American officials debated whether to pay tribute to the “Barbary” states (Algeria, Tripoli, and Tunis) to avoid being attacked or whether to build a navy to protect US shipping interests in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Newspapers carried debates over whether to ransom the captives or wage war to free them. For the history of the Tripolitan War and the creation of the US Navy, see Allen; Barnby; Allison; and Whipple.

3. For claims concerning the postnational nature of globalization, see, e.g., Miyoshi 258–63 and Sassen xxii–xxxvi. Critics such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in their recent book, *Empire*, argue that globalization, in its current form, is a distinctive economic and cultural structure emerging in the twentieth century. Although current forms of globalization differ significantly from those of the eighteenth century, the model of the nation-state has so dominated scholarship of the early national period in the US as to make earlier forms of globalization relatively invisible.

4. See Dana Nelson’s exploration of how white masculinity becomes a unifying identity during the Federalist period and beyond (29–60).

5. Capture of Americans occurred before this point but increased once Algiers signed a peace treaty with Spain and Algerian ships had access to the Atlantic through the straits of Gibraltar.

6. For information on voluntary societies organized in response to the hostages’ plight, see Wilson.

7. On the politicized venue of the theater and anti-British sentiment directed toward the theater, see Davis; McConachie 126–33; Silverman; and Withington 3–47. For women’s politicized role in the theater, see Kritzer and Branson 101–23. For an account of the theater in relation to transatlantic culture, see Roach.

8. For a discussion of Abigail Adams’s letters on women’s political role in the republic, see Gunderson 63–64. Kerber writes that, during this period, “[t]o accept an openly acknowledged role for women in the public sector was to invite extraordinary hostility and ridicule” (*Women* 279). Alternatively, on the ways in which women were able (under some conditions) to speak in public and participate politically, see Boydston; Branson; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst* 166–71; and Zagarri.

9. On the response of Cobbett and Swanwick to *Slaves in Algiers*, see Branson 112–17. Despite Republican support for *Slaves in Algiers*, Branson reports that Rowson’s other works were well received by Federalists. Rowson’s play *The Volunteers* apparently supported a Federalist point of view: George Washington attended the play in January 1795 thereby giving it the “Federalist seal of approval” (181). Marion Rust also places Rowson on the Federalist side of the fence (304). On Cobbett’s relation to feminism, see Scherr.

10. Ruth Bloch has influentially argued that the meaning of the term *virtue* migrated in the late eighteenth century from referring to a republican, masculine *virtù* to naming female chastity. However, in the 1790s, as the meaning of the term began to shift, both meanings of the word circulated in public discourse (47).
11. While neither Federalists nor Republicans endorsed women’s full political participation, Rosemarie Zagarri demonstrates that Federalists allowed women to speak publicly more often and to participate more actively than Republicans. See Zagarri; Branson 97; and Waldstreicher, In the Midst 167.

12. On changes in the franchise, see Smith, Civic Ideals 170–73 and Gunderson 65–66. For arguments concerning the attachment of Republicans (rather than Federalists) to a racialized politics, see Smith, Civic Ideals 174–81; Finkelman 152–56; and, more broadly, Stewart; Soderlund; and Horton.

13. According to Louis Harap, the Jewish brokers for the Dey of Algiers were treated with hostility and distrust by American officials (34–36).

14. For related claims concerning the way in which Royall Tyler’s Barbary captivity novel, The Algerine Captive (1797), produces a newly coherent American identity, see Ellison and Gardner.

15. Although Fetnah announces early in the play that she was born in England, no evidence concerning the racial identity of her mother is given in the play; we know that her father, Hassan, is Jewish.

16. Melish points out that narratives associating homosexuality with North Africa are common (157). On Federalist accusations linking French Republican politics with homosexuality, see Waldstreicher, “Federalism” 116.

17. Both Leonard Tennenhouse and Nancy Armstrong have made interesting arguments for the importance of a filiative culture in the early Republic—one in which daughters carry the burden of cultural filiation. As Rowson’s play indicates, and as Tennenhouse and Armstrong emphasize, daughters maintain the cultural link to England within the family. Prior to the Revolution, as colonists sought to remain British, genealogical ties could be understood primarily in national terms. After the Revolution, Armstrong suggests, Britishness can be maintained in American nationalist terms when it is recast as whiteness.

18. Foreign policy questions concerning the Barbary pirates and the fate of American captives in Algiers were considered by the same members of Congress who had earlier debated eradicating race slavery in the US. One of Benjamin Franklin’s final published works is an attack on legalized slavery in the US that satirizes supporters of slavery by presenting the proslavery views of an Algerian pirate: in the voice of (the fictional) Sidi Mehemet Ibrahim, he argues for the economic necessity of enslaving Christians (1158).

19. For a broader historical background on the Ottoman empire, the North African states, and the tradition of Barbary captivity narratives in relation to Europe, see Clissold; Colley, Captives; and Matar.

20. According to Benilde Montgomery, Rowson’s play is of a piece with a number of texts that used the Algerian hostage crisis to further the US abolitionist cause. Rowson never mentions the enslavement of African Americans, yet “the analogy was already so commonplace in the public discourse of Philadelphia in the summer of 1794 that it cannot have escaped the audience whom she addressed” (622). Given the explicit political claims of Rowson’s argument with respect to gender, it seems odd that she would leave an abolitionist argument unvoiced were it important to her.
21. In advancing this argument, I mean less to condemn Rowson for harboring an unacknowledged racism than to suggest the way in which political and economic structures in the early republic made racism an available and inviting tool, even for Rowson who was opposed to the slave trade and wrote against it in An Abridgment of Universal Geography (272).

22. Jefferson was far from alone in supporting deportation for freed slaves; colonization plans had widespread support in the period. On the history of the American Colonization Society, see Staudenraus. For Jefferson’s views on slavery and colonization, see Onuf and Saillant.

23. For additional discussion of this passage, see Elmer and Onuf 181.

24. Jefferson is not always specific with respect to where African Americans should be resettled. He proposes at one point that the West Indies and specifically St. Domingo might be appropriate places “beyond the limits of the United States to form a receptacle for these people,” although “Africa would offer a last & undoubted resort” (Writings 297). He explicitly rejects the idea of locating a colony in western territories of the US because, as Onuf points out, he imagines that the American people (a racialized, white nation) will ultimately take possession of much of the hemisphere (180).

25. More specifically, the Southern colonies remained peripheralized in their production of staple crops for a world market, but the Northern colonies began to assert a core status. In Wallerstein’s terms, the US in this period would be a “semi-peripheral” region with aspects of both core and peripheral economies. According to Wallerstein, the US achieved core status prior to World War I (Capitalist 29). At the close of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century, Wallerstein argues, the Northern US is “a semiperipheral area . . . at once exploiting and exploited and seeking to break loose and become a core nation by snapping the economic umbilical cord of the South to Great Britain” (Capitalist 218). See also The Modern World-System III (251). Although the US had not attained a dominant international status in this period, US independence was an important marker of movement toward a core role in the world economy: one distinguishing characteristic of a core region is a powerful state machinery.

26. On the historical connection between the discipline of literary study and the formation of national subjects, see Readings 72–75.

27. After the initial capture of ships in 1785, attacks on US ships accelerated in 1793 when Algiers negotiated peace with Portugal, enabling Algerian corsairs access to the Atlantic, where more than a dozen US ships were attacked and more than 150 Americans were taken captive. Escalating demands for tribute, and US unwillingness or inability to comply, resulted in raised tensions with North African states until the US authorized the deployment of naval forces in the Mediterranean in 1801 and Tripoli declared war on the US. After ineffectual attempts to enforce an embargo against Tripoli, the former consul to Tripoli, William Eaton, took action on a scheme to overthrow the Bashaw of Tripoli, Jusef Caramalli, and to install the Bashaw’s older brother, Hamet, on the throne. As memorialized in the hymn of the Marine Corps, Eaton marched hundreds of miles across the desert from Alexandria, Egypt, to Derne, a coastal Tripolitan city (“to the shores of Tripoli”) with a mixed corps of Greek mercenaries, US Marines, an ailing pack of camels, and an occasionally reluctant Hamet and succeeded in storming Derne and taking it
from the Tripolitans. Although historians argue (as did Eaton) that the US could easily have succeeded in taking the city of Tripoli at this point as well, Jefferson’s ambassador, Tobias Lear, negotiated peace with Jusef while Eaton and Hamet were in Derne. Under the peace agreement the US no longer agreed to pay tribute to Tripoli but did agree to pay $60,000 for the return of US captives and agreed to keep Hamet out of power. The results of the war were thus mixed: while Eaton was celebrated as a hero, his military victory was effectively undercut by Jefferson’s negotiations.

28. According to Ann Thomson, the call to colonize (rather than simply attack and destroy) North African states by France, England, and the US, began in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a period that Wallerstein describes as the moment when the Ottoman empire began to be incorporated into the world economy. Beginning with Abbé Raynal in 1770, calls for the conquest of North Africa were made in the name of Enlightenment ideals of progress and civilization. As Thomson points out, these arguments contain a unifying economic logic: “one of the undoubted advantages of civilising Barbary is the consequence that these states would then abandon piracy for agriculture, and would thus provide Europe with agricultural products” (112–13).

29. **Slaves in Algiers** was performed in Philadelphia on 30 June and 22 December 1794 (Pollock 419); in Baltimore on 20 November 1794 and 26 November 1795 (Ritchey 296); and in New York City on 9 May 1796 (Odell and Quirk I: 411).

30. Allison discusses the Turks’ appearance on stage as well (33).

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