

The Black Body Erotic and the Republican Body Politic, 1790–1820

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AN EROTICIZED black male body appears in a number of antislavery writings published and republished in America between 1790 and 1820. In these writings arose two entirely new elements in American writing. First is an erotic representation of the black male body—its visage, hands, muscle, skin, height, sex—unparalleled by the representation of any other body, black or white, male or female. Second is a *communitas*, blending sentimentalism and homocroticism, shared by black men and white men who unite in opposition to slavery. Earlier than the polemics of the antebellum abolitionists, these writings express an alternative to the republican racialism of postrevolutionary America in a time when ideas about race and slavery were in flux, not yet settled into the extremes of a proslavery view presupposing black inferiority and a liberal, sometimes perfectionist abolitionism. The eroticized black male body figures in antislavery variations on eighteenth-century sentimentalism and revolutionary republicanism, two strains of thought linked by the sentimentalist reconstruction of the classical ideal of martial virtue into an ideal of affection, benevolence, sentiment, and sympathy shared among men, the virtuous citizens of the American republic.¹ The black man who ap-

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¹Sentimentalism, republicanism, and Christianity in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century America are well treated in the following works: A. Owen Aldridge,

peared between 1790 and 1820 in antislavery narratives, essays, and poems is the "poor negro," deserving benevolence but denied it by his white masters.² This sentimentalized poor negro, on American soil, became an eroticized "friend," echoing the homoeroticism of classical martial virtue as well as gesturing toward nineteenth-century blackface and its interracial homocrotics.³ Rooted in the eighteenth century, the sentimentalized and eroticized black friend of the turn of the nineteenth

Thomas Paine's *American Ideology* (Newark, NJ, 1984); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967); James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History* 74 (1987): 9-33; Adrienne Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1943); Mark Valeri, "The New Divinity and the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (1989): 741-69; Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, NJ, 1978); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York, 1969), and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992); and Conrad Edick Wright, *The Transformation of Charity in Postrevolutionary New England* (Boston, 1992). Republicanism is a contentious issue in American historiography. A recent overview appears as "Special Issue: The Republican Synthesis Revisited: Essays in Honor of George Athan Billias," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 102 (1992): 69-224. My goal here is less to take a side in the republican/liberal debate than to suggest that the evolution from republicanism to liberalism was driven not only by economic factors (as is commonly accepted) but also by racial and sexual factors in which the black man is a commanding presence. For recent examples of the emphasis on economic factors, see the following: Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism, Liberalism, and Democracy: Political Culture in the Early Republic," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 102 (1992): 117; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Discovering the Subject of the 'Great Constitutional Discussion,' 1786-1789," *Journal of American History* 79 (1992): 847-49; and Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore, 1987).

²These writings share in the eighteenth-century "centrality of sentiment and pathos" (Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* [New York, 1986], pp. 1-9). Part of an Americanization of British sentimentalism, the "poor negro" is a black, American variation of "virtue in distress," prey to racism and economic exploitation. Remodeling conventional representations of distressed women, the sentimentalist depictions of black men were meant to elicit "humanity" from the reader (G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* [Chicago, 1992], pp. 219-34). The British background of sentimentalism is discussed in John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988). I agree with a recent argument that the use of the term "Age of Sensibility" has been too narrow because it has not included the way in which "race relations and sexual relations [were] represented in terms of sympathetic transactions" (Julie Ellison, "Race and Sensibility in the Early Republic: Ann Eliza Bleeker and Sarah Wentworth Morton," *American Literature* 65 [1993]: 446).

³Paul Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1992), pp. 128-33, 154-55; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1993).

century predates the eroticized figures of antebellum sentimental women's writing concerned with race and slavery.⁴

White men criticized black men in antislavery writings because in American ideology sentimentalism and republicanism grounded their vision of the body politic in a fundamental likeness among men that produces benevolence.⁵ Republicans believed some fundamental likeness to be required in a free society like postrevolutionary America. This notion of likeness echoed some prominent elements of the American past—Puritan covenant theology, the Calvinist doctrine of a benevolent providential design inhering in all people and things, the idealized communalism of farming communities, and the idealized unity of the patriots in the War of Independence. It also echoed some prominent elements in eighteenth-century European thought—both Montesquieu's notion of a "spirit" uniting a society and British sentimentalism and commonsense philosophy.⁶ Republicans lacked a proslavery argument, accepting merely the Montesquieuian view that any group that could not join in the spirit of a society should be enslaved or banished. Colonization, the expatriationist effort to remove black Americans to Africa or the Caribbean, flowed from this view of the black man as alien to the unifying

*Karen Sánchez-Eppler has noted the way in which a sentimentalism attributed to women led in the 1840s and 1850s to alluring depictions of black bodies, since "sentimental fiction constitutes an intensely bodily genre." "Miscegenation," she thus argues, "provides an essential motif of virtually all antislavery fiction" ("Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetoric of Feminism and Abolition," in *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations*, ed. Philip Fisher [Berkeley, 1991], pp. 235–40).

⁵For some of Jefferson's statements on "benevolence," "emulation," "imitation," and "virtue," see the following: *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh (Washington, DC, 1903), 1:116–19, 2:121, 177, 3:318, 12:393–94, 16:73; *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al. (Princeton, NJ, 1950–92), 1:76–77, 8:637.

⁶"How to attach people to one another and to the state? 'That was one of the central obsessions of the era," Gordon S. Wood has written of the revolutionary and postrevolutionary years. "The Enlightenment came to believe that there was 'a natural principle of attraction in man towards man,' and that these natural affinities were by themselves capable of holding the society together" (*The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, p. 214). See also Gordon S. Wood, "Illusions and Disillusions in the American Revolution," in *The American Revolution: Its Character and Limits*, ed. Jack P. Greene (New York, 1987), p. 358. For Montesquieu on sentiment and social unity, see Ann M. Cohler, *Montesquieu's Comparative Politics and the Spirit of American Constitutionalism* (Lawrence, KS, 1988), pp. 45–55. For Montesquieu's influence on Jefferson, see Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Baltimore, 1991), p. 67. For the "ward-republics," see Richard K. Matthews, *The Radical Politics of Thomas Jefferson: A Revisionist Approach* (Lawrence, KS, 1984), pp. 81–89.

likeness required in a republic.⁷ Still, Montesquieu, one of the greatest European influences on revolutionary and postrevolutionary American thought, had made it clear in 1750 that one "likeness" white men share with black men is precisely a sexual likeness.⁸ Attacking "Negro slavery," Montesquieu savaged the making of "eunuchs" as a way of depriving "blacks of their likeness to us in a more distinctive way."⁹ In a counter-discourse to American republicanism, interracial likeness and interracial benevolence were understood by antislavery writers to be rooted in physical similarities between the black male body and the white male body. The eroticization of black men in antislavery writing confirmed this likeness by uniting black men and white men in an affectionate and physical bond. Indeed, antislavery writing introduced the body in American writing, for no figure other than the black male is represented in such bodily detail and in such a sexualized fashion before 1790.

Eighteenth-century republican thought, like all systems of ideas and values, led its adherents into beliefs about their own sexuality as well as the sexuality of those defined as "other." The sexuality attributed to black men, the republican "other," was sometimes a wild rapaciousness and sometimes a sentimental adhesiveness. Republicanism provided a crucible in which antislavery thought sentimentalized and eroticized black men. The sentimentalization and eroticization of black men by white men functioned in a counterdiscourse to republican ideology, rubbing against one of its sorest points, the persistence of an enslaved, oppressed class in a republic founded by a liberty-loving people. The persistence of slavery placed leading republicans in an uncomfortable position, one impossible to sustain. Colonization, which men like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison viewed as essential to republicanism, was impractical, while republican discourse could disdain but not quell the notion that oppressed black men were like white men and thus were worthy of liberty and dignity. Republicans freed themselves from this un-

⁷Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., 2:192, 201. Colonizationist efforts are discussed in the following works: Robert McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia*, 2d ed. (Urbana, IL, 1973), esp. pp. 129-30; Duncan J. MacLeod, *Slavery, Race, and the American Revolution* (New York, 1974), pp. 78-85; John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (New York, 1977), pp. 164-70; P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York, 1961); and Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1770-1840* (Athens, GA, 1987), esp. pp. 190-91, 356-61.

⁸For Montesquieu's influence in America, see the following: Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago, 1988), pp. 89-94; and Paul Merrill Spurlin, *Montesquieu in America, 1760-1801* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1940).

⁹Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (New York, 1989), p. 250.

comfortable position only by freeing themselves from the eighteenth-century underpinnings of republican thought. The impulses to enslave blacks and to deny them an equal place in the social order, North as well as South, proved to be stronger than the commitment to revolutionary ideology. As liberal thought transformed the republican commitment to likeness, benevolence, and unity into a commitment to Protestant pluralism, economic freedom, and individualism, the dialectic between the view of the black man as an alien and the view of the black man as a sentimental friend came to an end. The writings examined in this essay were printed and reprinted in the decades in which it seemed that revolutionary republicanism would determine the character of American culture and its race relations. These writings were part of a debate, sometimes lively and sometimes desperate, about race, but insofar as their nexus is a black man and a white man in a sentimental friendship, they lost their potency after 1820 in a new, liberal America.

In the postrevolutionary decades, republican leaders promoted various strategies for fortifying likeness among white men—universal common education, the division of society into small “ward-republics,” and an empiricism that would unite people in common sense, not divide them by a fissiparous idealism. The black male, in the republican mind, threatened such unity not only because he was in some sense outside it—by slavery whites had already alienated blacks, reasoned republicans, while by nature the races were divided—but also because he had a claim to benevolence that white Americans at large were unwilling to recognize.¹⁰ This claim to benevolence was made explicit by black spokesmen of postrevolutionary America, who modulated their claims through religious doctrine, republican principles, and reminders of the virtuous service of blacks in difficulties like the revolutionary battles and the yellow fever epidemic.¹¹ Certain that the black man threatened the republic because he was both socially and naturally “heterogeneous,” republican

¹⁰Lipscomb and Bergh, eds., 1:72–73; Rahe, pp. 619, 636–37, 648; Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Times: The Sage of Monticello* (Boston, 1981), pp. 341–42.

¹¹Indeed, articulate black Americans of the postrevolutionary years, whether sophisticated ministers like Richard Allen and Lemuel Haynes or societies that left their beliefs inscribed in constitutions and proclamations, set their claims for black dignity exactly in the circle of benevolence. Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rev. Richard Allen, To Which Is Annexed the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Containing a Narrative of the Yellow Fever in the Year of Our Lord 1793, With an Address to the People of Color in the United States* (New York, 1960)—see pp. 19–26, 50, 72, 75–89 for comments on benevolence; Ruth Bogin, “‘Liberty Further Extended’: A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by Lemuel Haynes,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 40 (1983): 85–105 (see 98–104 for Haynes’s use of “natural Effectiveness” and “Disinterested Benevolence”); Lemuel Haynes, *The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism, with a Few Suggestions Favorable to Independence: A Discourse Deliv-*

leaders planned to maintain slavery until blacks could be expatriated, a plan that simply paralleled other republican strategies for creating white unity. No leading republican conceded that the benevolence required in a republic could cross the race line, so blacks, reasoned republicans, must be enslaved until the expatriation to Africa. So dogmatic was this notion that when James Monroe suggested that a settlement far in the west might suit both America and its blacks, Jefferson scolded him that even there blacks would be a "blot" and reminded him that the time to commence the expatriation was short.¹²

Essential to white thought on race and slavery in the early republic is the opposition between the schemes of the republican literati to remove blacks physically from America and the newspaper essays and pamphlets in which white men eagerly embraced black men and their claims to benevolence. Antislavery writings centering upon benevolent relations between a black man and a white man were not antirepublican but, rather, the issue of a different understanding of the connections among race, sentiment, and republicanism. Unlike the republican literati, white men who could imagine interracial benevolence had no place in the central republican discourse of postrevolutionary America; they published their thoughts anonymously in pamphlets and newspapers, creating an almost subterranean republican commentary on race. As the Jeffersonians and other expatriationists monopolized political philosophy and religious discourse, other men with a vision of interracial benevolence modulated their ideas and values through the erotics of masculine relationships. In other words, when it became all but impossible to address interracial benevolence, which was the heart of the matter, in republican political philosophy and religion, a handful of white men turned to a union of bodies. Eros, one urge behind sentiment, became an eroticism of black men and white men when American ideology condemned interracial benevolence.

A French Montesquieuian provided Americans a model for eroticization in antislavery writing. Joseph LaVallée's *Le nègre comme il y a peu de blancs*, published in Paris in 1789, appeared almost immediately in English.¹³ Two different English translations appeared in London in

erred at Rutland (Vermont) the Fourth of July 1801, It Being the 25th Anniversary of American Independence (Rutland, VT, 1801), pp. 7-13; *Laws of the African Society, Instituted at Boston, Anno Domini, 1796* (Boston, 1802); *The Proceedings of the Free African Union Society and the African Benevolent Society, Newport, Rhode Island 1780-1824*, ed. William H. Robinson (Providence, RI, 1976), pp. 145-46.

¹²Lipcomb and Bergh, eds., 10:294-97.

¹³Joseph LaVallée, *Le nègre comme il y a peu de blancs* (Paris, 1789). The work was reprinted in France in 1795 and 1800. "Antislavery" deserves a comment here that applies

1790, *The Negro as There Are Few White Men* and *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*. A Philadelphia periodical, the *American Museum, or Universal Magazine*, carried *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans* in installments in 1791. Finally, in 1801, an American edition appeared in Philadelphia.¹⁴ The status of LaVallée's *Negro* as an important antislavery text is suggested by the long list of subscribers for the American edition, including two eloquent spokesmen for black rights and dignity, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones.¹⁵ The novel, presented as an autobiography of the African Itanoko, seems to have directly influenced American thought about slavery as well as capturing the spirit of the republican age in which slavery became a problem in political philosophy. The language and the incidents of the novel are echoed in later writings about slavery, while two of LaVallée's themes—the beauty of the black male body and the value of intimate, benevolent relations between a black man and a white man—became central in newspaper and pamphlet writings about race and slavery. Although its male protagonists love women, LaVallée's *Negro* both valorizes an erotic relationship between Itanoko and a white man intent on securing his enslaved friend's liberty and condemns sexual connections between enslaved black men and white men who exploit them sexually but are uninterested in their freedom. In its homoeroticism, LaVallée's *Negro* presented Americans with a new object of representation—the black male body. The most remarkable element in postrevolutionary American periodical essays and religious tracts concerning slavery is the emergence of the black male body as an object of

to all the texts examined in this article. The antislavery thought expressed in these texts is at least as much sentimental and paternalistic as fraternal and egalitarian. The African-American antislavery thought of its day, such as that of Lemuel Haynes and John Marrant, rejected its paternalism. Lacking interest in the self-determination of African Americans, the authors of the texts examined here partook of a white paternalism that would come to be important in antebellum proslavery thought. A belief in sentiment as the force that would alleviate slavery led the authors examined here into a paternalism in which the white man frees the black as the two come to recognize their sentimental ties. Thus even the claims of black superiority in beauty and sentiment could serve to subordinate the black man waiting for the recognition of his sentiments and for his liberation.

¹⁴Joseph LaVallée, *The Negro As There Are Few White Men*, trans. J. Trapp (London, 1790); I read this translation in the Rare Book Room of the Boston Public Library. The other versions mentioned include Joseph LaVallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans* (London, 1790; Dublin, 1791; Philadelphia, 1801), and "The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans," *American Museum, or Universal Magazine* 9 (January–June 1791): 53–60, 99–107, 145–53, 205–13, 257–65, 313–24; 10 (July–December 1791): 29–40, 77–88, 129–44, 185–200, 241–56, 285–303. All quotations are from the 1801 printing, except as noted.

¹⁵LaVallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*, 2:239–44.

representation—a new object framed by the sentimentalism, republicanism, and Christianity that defined American ideas and values. As white Americans wrestled with the problem of slavery in a new democratic and Christian republic, they were thrust by their ideas and values into this new zone—the black male body.

An announcement that whites must accept blacks either as “slaves” or as “friends” sounds the opening note of LaVallée’s *Negro*, which chronicles the African’s adventures with men who seek to enslave or to befriend him.¹⁶ Whatever their intention, the men who encounter Itanoko are immediately enthralled by his pulchritude. In its antislavery sentiments and its tales of black-white relationships, the novel casts the black male body as the supremely important object of representation. Itanoko is first heard in the narrative as he addresses the “beauty” he shares with the black “nation”: “I have not to complain of Nature. She endowed me with a robust form, a distinguished height. To that she added the beauty of my nation: a jet black, a full forehead, piercing eyes, a large mouth, and fine teeth.”¹⁷ Constant elements in the narrative, Itanoko’s “height and muscle” are admired by all the men he meets, both black and white.¹⁸ Not content with height and muscle, the translator of the first London edition emphasized the nudity of Itanoko, who lacks “pudicity”—modesty concerning his genitalia.¹⁹ When Itanoko is seized by a neighboring African prince who seems to desire him as a caged companion—Itanoko is given free run of the palace but is forbidden to leave the premises—these circumstances are explained thus: “My height, my air, my figure struck him.”²⁰ When Itanoko escapes from the palace by means of a prodigious swim to a ship anchored off-shore, a ship’s officer, upon pulling him out of the water and first glimpsing the African’s physique, exclaims, “This is the finest negro I have ever seen.”²¹ As the ship’s captain admires him, Itanoko notes, “My fine figure struck him.”²² Again the first translator emphasized Itanoko’s sexuality, by indulging in a double entendre on “bodily parts” and “bed.” Itanoko swims to the French slaver at night and when he climbs nude into the light he reports, “If the reader observed what I said above respecting my bodily parts, he will not wonder at the air of astonishment with which they received me. Zounds! cries the officer on watch, with an energetic oath, that’s the finest black

¹⁶Ibid., 1:5.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁹LaVallée, *The Negro As There Are Few White Men*, 1:14.

²⁰LaVallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*, 1:40.

²¹Ibid., p. 48.

²²Ibid., p. 61.

I ever clapt my eyes on; how lucky is the captain, why, fortune hunts him even in bed."²³

Itanoko's beauty distinguishes him not only from the white characters of his narrative, whose bodies are almost never represented, but also from the white figures who appear in American writing of the late eighteenth century. In American writing, informed by sentimentalism, republicanism, and Christianity, a white man appears ideally as a neighbor, brave citizen, loyal family man, or pious believer, but never as a body endowed with remarkable beauty. "The good husband, the good father, the good friend, the good neighbour," announced *American Museum, or Universal Magazine*, "we honor as a good man worthy of our love and affection."²⁴ LaVallée's identification with Itanoko's beauty—the narrator's projection into a beautiful black male body as well as the whites' frank appreciation of the African—engendered a subgenre of American writing in which Itanoko's black sons displayed their beauty.

Itanoko's brave swim makes him a slave, since he has unknowingly swum to a French slaver, but it sets him in the benevolent relationship that dominates the rest of his narrative. Itanoko's capacity for male-to-male benevolence is well established by the time he swims to the slaver, since he has two such connections in his past. One was with his boyhood friend Otourou, his "friend" and "brother," with whom Itanoko shared "one soul" and, as boys, "one cradle."²⁵ Mutual devotion and disinterestedness characterize their friendship. The other was with Dumont, a Frenchman who survived a shipwreck on the Senegalese coast to become Itanoko's tutor in French and Christianity. "Sympathy," "analogy," "sentiment," "love," and "the ties of the heart" unite Itanoko and

²³ LaVallée, *The Negro As There Are Few White Men*, 1:61. By the end of the eighteenth century, the word "parts" had a well established sexual connotation in "privy parts" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "privy parts").

²⁴ *American Museum, or Universal Magazine* 9 (1791): 275. Jefferson's republican "good man" is "he whose every thought and deed by rules of virtue moves," who assumes a "neighbor's" role, "not stranger-like" but integrated into his community and uninterested in profiting from his peers (Lipscomb and Bergh, eds. [n. 5 above], 16:110-11). For Timothy Dwight's Federalist ideal of masculine neighborliness, see *Greenfield Hill*, in *The Major Poems of Timothy Dwight*, ed. William J. McTaggart and William K. Bottorff (Gainesville, FL, 1969), pp. 481-95. Neither Jefferson nor Dwight includes any notion of masculine beauty in these representations of white men.

²⁵ LaVallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans* (n. 14 above), 1:21-22. This notion of black benevolence was probably related to a belief that blacks were likely to participate in what modern social scientists describe as "same-sex dyadic ties," which, some scholars speculate, were extensions of "'shipmate' relationships" formed in transport from Africa (Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* [Philadelphia, 1976], pp. 22-23).

Dumont, while Christianity shapes their intimacy. Finding Dumont in prayer, for instance, Itanoko reports, "I threw myself into his arms. 'Inform me,' said I, 'why do you do this.' He embraced me. Tears of joy sprang from his eyes."²⁶ Yet, Otourou and Dumont merely prefigure the man whose friendship Itanoko comes to value most, the slave ship captain's son, Ferdinand. Hungry after his great swim to the ship, Itanoko is fed European food for the first time, but he finds even the "pleasing" new tastes overwhelmed by the young man who feeds him. "Nothing," Itanoko declares, "gave me such pleasure as the sight of Ferdinand. Tall and finely formed, he possessed also an ingenuous countenance, which ever attaches to the heart in the first instance. I could not resist it."²⁷

The intimacy that immediately burgeons between the young black man and the young white man seems to be blighted when Ferdinand's father has Itanoko chained in the hold with the other captives. Having remarked several times on the African's beauty, the slave ship's captain plots to sell Itanoko into a servitude particularly suited to his appearance, presumably a position of sexual service.²⁸ Associating Ferdinand with the slave traffic, Itanoko locks his heart against the young white man who nevertheless visits him in the hold. "Many times during the day did Ferdinand approach me," Itanoko recalls, but "my heart was entirely shut up."²⁹ Only when Ferdinand declares himself against slavery can Itanoko reopen his heart. For, undaunted by the African's coolness, Ferdinand undoes the leg irons of the friend he desires and promises Itanoko that things will be better, despite his current pain. "I answered not a word," Itanoko states. "I could not speak. If I had possessed that power, resentment alone would have furnished my expressions. But, as no one was then near us, he seized my irons, and threw them into the sea with such indignation, that this action, which did not escape me, instantly disarmed me. I took his hand and pressed it to my heart. He understood my language, and answered with sobs."³⁰ As Ferdinand's "tears" serve to resurrect their mutual benevolence, Itanoko reports that these entreaties "penetrated me."³¹ Ferdinand keeps his promise to Itanoko by giving him money with which to buy his freedom; they will be

²⁶ LaVallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*, 1:12-14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51. The first translation takes a slightly different approach to this meeting: "Well shaped, straight, endowed with the happiest and sweetest countenance, he was possessed of those secret charms which conquer the heart at first sight. I did not hold out. . . . Sir by me, said I, so beautiful a face, cannot be without a noble soul" (*The Negro As There Are Few White Men* [n. 14 above], 1:65).

²⁸ LaVallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*, 1:61-75.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

separated soon, but Itanoko, Ferdinand explains, can pass the money to a confidant in St. Domingue, who will buy the African from his new master and orchestrate a reunion between the two friends. The gold coins exchanged between Ferdinand and Itanoko are themselves homoerotically charged, since they are given while the African is chained and are to be hidden while he is in the hold, in the slave market in St. Domingue, and on a plantation, until he can meet Ferdinand's confidant. Only by secreting the gold coins in his rectum can Itanoko secure the liberty Ferdinand provides him.³²

If Ferdinand loves Itanoko, Ferdinand's father, Urban, it seems, rapes Itanoko. Urban's plan to sell Itanoko into a position of sexual service seems to require that the white slaver rape the black man. Calling Urban a "ravisher" and then a "perfidious ravisher," Itanoko reports that the slaver "was struck by my comeliness" and pushed into a state of "covetousness." Urban was led to "violate, what is most sacred among men," forcing Itanoko into this position: "I bore resemblance to a man, who, weary with struggling against a tiger, that threatened his life, would fall into a voluptuous sleep, between the clutches of the monster." As several white men examine Itanoko, Urban leers, in what is probably an eighteenth-century version of a phallic joke, "He will be taller yet."³³

Commitment to the black man's liberty fosters intimacy between Itanoko and Ferdinand. However, in St. Domingue in his quest for liberty and reunion with Ferdinand, Itanoko encounters a different sort of young white man. As the slavers zero in on Itanoko, Ferdinand's friends spirit him off to a sugar cane plantation where he will be cached, surrounded by slaves. On the plantation, Itanoko encounters Theodore, whose "criminal complaisance with the overseer" allows him to give "free scope to his irregular passions" with the plantation slaves, who were around 1790 mostly male.³⁴ These "irregular passions" apparently include sexual activity with black men, which LaVallée calls "crime," "vice," and "rapine," all "enormities" resulting from "unbridled disorders" and "passion."³⁵ Moreover, Itanoko discovers, Theodore seems in-

³² Ibid., pp. 76-77.

³³ LaVallée, *The Negro As There Are Few White Men*, 1:80-98. By the end of the eighteenth century, the word "embrace" had a long history of association with sexual intercourse, the word "violate" had a long history of meaning rape, and the word "voluptuous" had a long history of meaning sensual. "Ravish" had a long history of meaning rape, while "ravisher" meant in particular rapist (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "embrace," "violate," "voluptuous," "ravish," and "ravisher").

³⁴ Caribbean plantation owners preferred buying new stocks of young African men to encouraging indigenous slave families, since the cost of buying a young man was considered less than the cost of rearing a child to be a slave.

³⁵ LaVallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans* (n. 14 above), 1:86, 109-11.

tent on the new African on the plantation: "Theodore at first regarded me only as a young man who would serve as a companion for his irregularities. He had not the usual prejudice of the Europeans who think they dishonor themselves by admitting us to their society; but it was debauchery alone which gave him this apparent philosophy. . . . His amusements were too far removed from my taste to permit me to accept an equality to which my principles must have been sacrificed."²⁶ As the first British translation has it, Theodore indulged "shameful pleasures, only fit for darkness" on the plantation, far from those who might hear "the moans of the victims of his violence"; he "at first, saw in me but a young man, whose inexperience gave him hope of complaisance."²⁷ When Itanoko proves not to be complaisant, Theodore plots the African's death.

LaVallée condemns Theodore not for desire, but for refusal to join desire for black men to an opposition to slavery. Itanoko and Ferdinand embrace precisely because the white man opposes slavery. Their intimacy reflects their commitment to freedom. When they embrace upon parting, Ferdinand reminds Itanoko of that commitment. Itanoko recalls that "melting into tears, I precipitated myself into his arms. 'Cherish,' cried he, 'the principles which we have cultivated together.' . . . We held each other long embracing without speaking."²⁸ Sentimentalist opposition to slavery, presupposing that the black man is either slave or friend of the white, assures us that Itanoko must resist the advances of a white man who desires the slave's body but not his liberty. Indeed, LaVallée uses the very man who spirits Itanoko away from the slavers to emphasize that a man's desire for black males is immoral only if joined to a toleration of slavery. Itanoko immediately notes that his new companion, the middle-aged Frenchman Dumenil, is unmarried—LaVallée's cliffhanger leads the reader to believe that Dumenil has purchased the African for sexual service—and so queries the white man's servants about his marital status. Dumenil "has never taken a companion to his bosom," reply the servants laconically.²⁹ After such suggestions of homosexuality, Dumenil is revealed to be a Christian helpmate of Itanoko and Ferdinand, not a sexual predator like Theodore. LaVallée could hardly have more strongly emphasized that white men's interest in black men and love of them leads to black liberty, while white men's exploitation of black men and passion for them leads to black slavery.

As an originating text, LaVallée's *Negro* reads like a textbook of the

²⁶Ibid., p. 111.

²⁷LaVallée, *The Negro As There Are Few White Men* (n. 14 above), 1:152, 155. Itanoko also reports that when Theodore chose a man-servant, "One may sufficiently guess that luxuriance of shape had been more consulted, than personal qualifications" (p. 156).

²⁸LaVallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*, 1:93.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 101-2.

themes appearing in American writing about slavery in the 1790s and early 1800s. Its forthright republicanism is evident in the notion that slavery is unlawful because "the liberty of man is an inalienable right."⁴⁰ Avarice, passion, and a desire for luxury lead to the enslavement of some human beings by others, according to LaVallée's republicanism.⁴¹ Extending both antislavery and proslavery thinking into a zone centered on the black male body, LaVallée's antislavery characters develop intimacy across the race line, while his proslavery characters reveal their obsession with the black male body even within their desire to enslave and break it. The homoerotic feeling that apparently receives LaVallée's blessing is one elevated by republican brotherhood and Christian love, not one vitiated by passion. LaVallée's naturally benevolent black men, moreover, help one another escape slavery and its cruelties. This notion is well represented in the natural benevolence shared by Itanoko and Otourou, who disinterestedly places his friend's interest before his own and seeks his friend's liberty out of a spirit of "friendship alone."⁴² Finally, LaVallée penned a scene that would be replicated in American antislavery writing: a black man and a white man go off alone into a sublime setting, at which point the writer turns to a rhapsody about the beauty that the two men together encounter. For instance, Itanoko and Dumont retreat, as the "sun [descends] toward the horizon," to a beautiful spot in Senegal, where they breathe in the "sweet perfumes" of flowers under a "serene" sky. This scene "ravishes my senses," cries Itanoko. With nightfall they return, the African finding that his "heart was full."⁴³ In general, this scene of two people going off alone into a sublime setting is highly eroticized in writings about race and slavery; whether the two are a black man and a black woman or a black man and a white man, the same turn to a rhapsody about beauty appears.

A new Itanoko appeared in American newspapers as "Quashi; or, The Desperate Negro," in the 1790s.⁴⁴ His narrative itself is simple. Quashi and his master share benevolent affection, based in boyhood intimacy, but fractured by the master when he wrongly credits an accusation made

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 67.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 63, 66, 69.

⁴²Ibid., p. 153.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 15-18.

⁴⁴Two periodical versions are "Quashi, or the Desperate Negro," *Massachusetts Magazine, or Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment* 5 (1793): 583-84; and "Quashi the Negro, a True Story," *Vergennes Gazette* 1 (October 18, 1798): 4. A pamphlet version is *The Story of Quashi; or, The Desperate Negro* (Newburyport, MA, 1820). This pamphlet, which nearly duplicates the 1793 version, is the source of all references here, except as noted. The source of the Quashi stories is apparently Reverend James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London, 1784), pp. 248-53.

against his devoted slave. The meaning of Quashi's narrative is that benevolence can characterize black-white relations, while slavery is essentially a violation of benevolence. Quashi's narrative ends improbably in his suicide after he reproaches his master for the white man's abandonment of their mutual "attachment."⁴⁵ Within this series of events, Quashi's beauty is joined to benevolence, while the violation of his beauty by the whipping his master plans is joined to slavery and its abnegation of benevolence. Quashi's body, in his skin and even his thighs, is central to the narrative, while his master, a typical white character, hardly appears as a body.

Reared as "playfellow to his young master," Quashi, "a lad of parts," became as a man the "driver" or "black overseer, under his master." (One newspaper here substitutes "companion" for "master.")⁴⁶ Within this master-slave relationship, Quashi retains "the tenderness" and "the affection" for his master that had been nourished in "their boyish intimacy." Within this benevolent connection, Quashi "had no separate interest." "The most delicate, yet most strong, and seemingly indissoluble tie that could bind master and slave together" seemed to be the fruit of their lifelong intimacy.⁴⁷ However, when the master wrongly believes Quashi guilty of a minor infraction of plantation discipline, slavery is revealed as a violation of benevolence and Quashi's beauty enters the narrative. The master resolves to whip Quashi, who, never having been whipped, has maintained "the smoothness of his skin"—in the original, "the glossy honours of his skin"—precisely because of his benevolent connection with his master. This scourging of black skin rivets attention on the black man's body and his beauty: "A Negro, who has grown up to manhood, without undergoing a solemn cart whipping (as some by good chance will), especially if distinguished by any accomplishment among his fellows, takes pride in what he calls the smoothness of his skin, and its being unraised by the whip; and would be at more pains, and use more diligence to escape such a cart-whipping, than many of our lower sort would to shun the gallows."⁴⁸ Quashi responds to his master's resolution by avoiding the white man and seeking a white "mediator" or "advocate" to intercede, since he himself feels unable to speak.

⁴⁵ *The Story of Quashi*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ "Quashi the Negro, a True Story," p. 4.

⁴⁷ *The Story of Quashi*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6. Ramsay, p. 251. The 1820 version (*The Story of Quashi*) substitutes "unraised" for the "unraised" of the 1793 version ("Quashi, or the Desperate Negro"). This change could be an error or else a self-conscious effort to use "unraised" (a variant of "un-raised") to suggest even more of the violence of whipping than does "unraised." Since there are no other misspellings in the pamphlet, and since it is a well-produced, illustrated booklet, I suspect that the change was made self-consciously.

After Quashi is unable to secure a mediator and unable to speak directly to the friend who is betraying him, the black man and the white man struggle on the ground in a morbid travesty of sexual intercourse:

Quashi ran off, and his master who was a robust man, pursued him. A stone, or a clod, tripped Quashi up, just as the other reached out to seize him. They fell together, and struggled for the mastery; for Quashi was a stout man, and the elevation of his mind added vigor to his arm. At last, after a severe struggle Quashi got firmly seated on his master's breast, now panting and out of breath, and with his weight, his thighs, and one hand, secured him motionless. He then drew out a sharp knife, and while the other lay in dreadful expectation, helpless and shrinking into himself, he thus addressed him:—"Master, I was bred up with you from a child; I was your playfellow when a boy; I have loved you as myself; your interest has been my own. I am innocent of what you suspect; but had I been guilty, my attachment to you might have pleaded for me; yet you condemn me to a punishment of which I must ever have borne the disgraceful marks,—thus only can I avoid it." 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 his blood.⁴⁹

While benevolence is possible between black and white, Quashi's narrative instructs, slavery violates black beauty as well as benevolence. Indeed, a newspaper that reprinted Quashi's narrative made explicit, one week before the appearance of the black man's tale, the value of the benevolence his master violated: "The *social* principle in man is of such an expansive nature, that it cannot be confined within the circuit of a family, of friends, or a neighborhood; it spreads into wider systems, and draw [*sic*] men into larger confederacies, communities and commonwealths. It is in these only that the higher powers of our nature attain the highest improvement and perfection of which they are possible"⁵⁰

Other young black men replicated Itanoko's and Quashi's beauty in American writing of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth. One was Selico, whose narrative began appearing in 1798, in the *American Universal Magazine* and the *Philadelphia Minerva*.⁵¹ "Of all the negroes of Juida," the narrator assured his readers, "Selico was the blackest, the best made, and the most amiable."⁵² Zami, who also appeared in the

⁴⁹*The Story of Quashi*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁰"Duties of Society," *Vergennes Gazette* 1 (October 11, 1798): 4.

⁵¹"Selico, an African Tale," *American Universal Magazine* 4 (1798): 183-92. Selico's tale was also printed in the *Philadelphia Minerva* 4 (1798): 13-21.

⁵²"Selico, an African Tale," p. 185.

American Universal Magazine in 1798, was "aged eighteen, beautiful in shape as the Apollo of Belvedere, and full of spirit and courage." Zami's associate, Makandal, who is quite self-conscious about his allure and sexual prowess, states to his fellow slave, "Zami, you know the formidable power of my image."⁵² Zembo appeared in the *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* in 1807, "Tall and shapely as the palm, / A storm in war, in peace a calm; / Black as midnight without moon, / Bold and undisguised as noon."⁵⁴ This string of valorizing adjectives culminating in "undisguised" (i.e., nude) is an early example of what Eric Lott identifies as "white men's investment in the black penis."⁵⁵ The vibrant sexuality of such young black men arises in their narratives. The white men who penned these tales clearly identified with the sexual prowess they attributed to black men; even a prim condemnation of sexual excess does nothing to mask the enthusiastic language used to describe black men's sexual exploits.

In his adventures, Selico "penetrates" a sultan's seraglio and launches himself into a rollicking series of events in which he is rescued from torture and immolation only when he explains to the sultan that he is not a rapist but a votary of love.⁵⁶ Zami is linked to the Apollo of Belvedere, a male nude of the young god known as the lover of Daphne, Coronis, and Cassandra. Significantly, perhaps, Apollo was the god of divine distance, who warned from afar of humankind's guilt and who spoke through oracles of the future and the will of his father, Zeus. Also, Apollo was a victim of his brother Hermes' thievery, but became reconciled to Hermes through Zeus's judgment. The significance of a black American Apollo—erotic brother, betrayed and prophetic—is easy to see, whether or not this anonymous writer was fully aware of the resonance of his analogy. Makandal's remarkable sexual prowess began early, according to the narrator of his tale:

At the age of fifteen or sixteen, love began to inflame his breast, and to rule with the most astonishing impetuosity. He did not, however, entertain an exclusive passion for one object, but any woman who possessed any charms, received part of his homage,

⁵²"Account of a Remarkable Conspiracy Formed by a Negro on the Island of St. Domingue," *American Universal Magazine* 4 (1798): 196–97. This was reprinted in the *New York Minerva* 2 (1823): 74–75. The 1798 version is the source of all references here.

⁵⁴James Montgomery, "Zembo and Nila: An African Tale," *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* 4 (1807): 603–4.

⁵⁵Lott (n. 3 above), p. 121.

⁵⁶"Selico, an African Tale," pp. 188–89. By the end of the eighteenth century, the word "penetration" had a well-established sexual meaning in penile penetration (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "penetration").

and inflamed his senses. His passion acquired energy and activity in proportion as the objects which inspired it were multiplied. In every quarter he had a mistress. It is well known, that among the negroes, enjoyment soon follows desire; and that satiety and indifference are the usual consequence; but Makandal, on the contrary, appeared always to be more enamored of those who had contributed to his felicity.⁵⁷

Zami shares his fellow slave's avid sexuality, for Zami and his lover, Samba, meet "at a private place, where, amidst a grove of odiferous orange trees, on the turf, ever crowned with verdure, under a serene sky, never obscured by clouds, in the presence of the sparkling orbs of heaven, and favored by the silence of night, they renewed the ardent testimonies of their affection and comforted each other by the tenderest caresses." Unsurprisingly, "this happiness" leads Samba to discover that "she was about to become a mother."⁵⁸ Recalling LaVallée's men paired before nature's ravishing beauty, this scene involves two characters paired in a beautiful natural setting and a turn of the writer away from explicit description of the characters to an evocation of the sublimity of nature. The manly young Zembo, after slaying a tiger, similarly envelops a woman with "his eager arms" in "the broad palmetto shade."⁵⁹ Sometimes the characters are a black man and a white man, sometimes a black man and a black woman. The former encounter is more or less clearly homoerotic, while even the latter is homoerotic since it is written by a white man who identifies with both the black male in sexual intercourse and the female with whom he shares his "happiness."⁶⁰

Itanoko, Otourou, Quashi, Selico, Zami, Makandal, and Zembo are revived in William, another young black man who becomes a white man's object of representation. In 1815 appeared an Anglican minister's account of his conversion of a black servant, William; the account equally describes the minister's conversion to an erotic Christian love for the

⁵⁷"Account of a Remarkable Conspiracy Formed by a Negro on the Island of St. Domingue," pp. 193-94.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 197.

⁵⁹Montgomery, p. 604.

⁶⁰In *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1968), pp. 136-78, Winthrop D. Jordan has explored the sexual implications of the fact that white "desire and aversion rested on the bedrock fact that white men perceived Negroes as being both alike and different from themselves" (p. 137). Jordan's interest is in explaining both miscegenation and the "fundamentally sexual" character of "white men's insecurity vis-à-vis the Negro" (p. 156). My interest, however, is in white men's eroticization of black men as an extension of sentiment, part of a counterdiscourse to republicanism that still shared the sentimentalist presuppositions of leading republicans.

young black man. First a pamphlet, the story of William's conversion was reprinted as a newspaper account soon afterward.⁶¹ William's story opens with an association of benevolence, liberty, and Christianity. The minister encounters William because, in the words attributed to the black man, his "master" is "good" and has made him "free" by awarding him his "liberty." William resides with his former master, who has noticed a spark of Christian faith in his black protégé and thus asks the minister for guidance. The minister visits William, discovering that he can read the Bible and that he is "a very young looking man with a sensible, lively, and pleasing turn of countenance." William, the minister discovers, is seeking "Christian friends" and is prone to "cry" upon contemplating Jesus. The manumitted slave's desire for friendship and his Christian sentimentalism not only recall LaVallée's distinction between slave and friend, but also augur a benevolent consanguinity between the minister and the black man. Yet not everyone, the minister also discovers, regards William benevolently, for when he speaks of his love for Jesus, some white people call him "negro dog, and black hypocrite." The minister's interest in William intensifies when the black man describes his idea of Christian love, a straightforward version of universal benevolence: "Me love all men, black men and white men, too."⁶²

After this first interview, the minister reports, he found himself drawn to visit William again soon. Mounting his horse, the minister soon finds himself in a scene echoing Itanoko and Dumont before the ravishing beauty of nature in Senegal, Zami and Samba "on the turf," and Zembo with his lover in his eager arms under the tropical trees. Choosing a scenic route along the coast in order to admire the beauties of nature, the minister discovers William solitary there, an object in nature's beauty yet also an apparent soul mate who has likewise come out along the coast on a Christian mission—reading his Bible. In the minister's words: "The road which I took lay over a lofty down or hill, which commands a prospect of scenery seldom equalled for beauty and magnificence. It gave birth to silent but instructive meditation. I cast my eye downwards a little to the left, towards a small cove, the shore of which consists of fine

⁶¹ "I have used "Narrative of a Negro Servant," *Christian Messenger* 1 (November 13, 1816): 59–61 and (November 20, 1816): 65–66. This narrative is attributed to Legh Richmond (1772–1827). At least nine other printings appeared before 1820: *The Negro Servant, and the Young Cottager* (New York, 1815); *Annals of the Poor: Containing the Dairyman's Daughter (with Considerable Additions), the Negro Servant, and the Young Cottager* (New Haven, CT, 1815); *The Negro Servant, an Authentic and Interesting Narrative* (Andover, MA, 1815; Boston, 1815; New York, 1815); *The African Servant* (Andover, MA, 1816; Andover, MA, 1818); *The Negro Servant: An Authentic Narrative* (Boston, 1816[?]); *The Negro Servant* (Philadelphia, 1817).

⁶² "Narrative of a Negro Servant," pp. 59–61.

hard sand. It is surrounded by fragments of rock, chalk cliffs, and steep banks of broken earth. Shut out from human intercourse and dwellings, it seems formed for retirement and contemplation. On one of these rocks, I unexpectedly observed a man sitting with a book." Peering down, the minister recognizes William. "The black color of his features, contrasted with the white rocks beside him," reports the minister, reveals the man as "my Negro disciple. . . . I rejoiced at this unlooked-for opportunity of meeting him in so solitary and interesting a situation." Roping his horse to a tree, the minister scrambles downhill to meet William. Even the description of the path suggests that the minister finds William in a masculine paradise, for the way to the black man was "formed by fishermen and shepherds' boys in the side of the cliff." The minister's inference that he has found a soul mate who shares his appreciation of nature and his Christian commitment is soon amply confirmed.

Their talk immediately turns to religion, leading William and the minister to address their likeness. "Me wish me was like you," declares William. "Like me, William? Why, you are like me, a poor helpless sinner," responds the minister. Both agree that the black man should fly to the minister who represents God. "Come to Jesus," says the minister. "'Yes, Massa,' said the poor fellow weeping, 'me will come: but me come very slow; very slow, Massa; me want to run, me want to fly.—Jesus is very good to poor Negro, to send you to tell him this.'" After this positive evidence of William's faith, the minister uses a religious trope to broach the subject of William's semen and helps William fill his heart with God in a conversion experience. God's promise, asserts the minister, is that "he will not only 'pour water upon him that is thirsty,' but 'I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessings upon thine offspring.'" ⁶³ The understanding of blessing that the minister attributes to William is rooted in the body and its orifices, for the black man desires, he says, that God "purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean." William's purgation is that of the body as well as that of the spirit (Psalms 51:7). The biblical hyssop was probably a type of caper, but the hyssop long known to European and American folk medicine, a variety of mint, indeed purges the body. After purgation, William is filled with God: "This was a new and solemn 'house of prayer.' The sea-sand was our floor, the heavens were our roof, the cliffs, the rocks, the hills, and the waves, formed the walls of our chamber. It was not indeed a 'place where prayer was wont to be made;' but for this once, it became a hallowed spot: it will by me ever be remembered as such. The presence of God was there.—I prayed—The Negro wept. His heart was full. I felt with him, and wept likewise."

⁶³ By the end of the eighteenth century, the word "seed" had a long history of meaning semen (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d. ed., s.v. "seed," definition 4).

The praying finished, William and the minister must leave. The minister finds that he must trust in William's body as he ascends to his horse. "It was time for my return, I leaned upon his arm, as we ascended the steep cliff on my way back to my horse, which I had left at the top of the hill," reports the minister. "Humility and thankfulness were marked in his countenance. I leaned upon his arm with the feeling of a *brother*. It was a relationship I was happy to own—I took him by the hand at parting." As he rides out of the woods, the minister muses that his experience with William "produced a sensation not easy to be expressed." Still, the minister advances hopefully, "The last day will shew, whether our tears were not the tears of sincerity and Christian love."

The minister again is unable to be apart from William. Riding to the home of William's master, he finds the black man awaiting him in a grove. "Ah! Massa," cries William, "me very glad to see you, me think you long time coming." The minister then begins to call William "brother from Africa." Both William and the minister rivet their attention on the black man's body, William humbly claiming that his "soul" is "more black" than his "body" and the minister borrowing from the Bible to add new verses to a hymn featuring William: "Though he's black, he's comely too." Even the saintly William seems inevitably physicalized in the imagination of the minister, who declares of the black man, "He was a monument to the Lord's praise."⁶⁴ The point of William's tale is that the affectionate, eroticized consanguinity shared by the black man and the white man overturns the violent seizure that brought the African to America: "Me left father and mother one day at home, to go to get sea shells by the sea shore; and, as I was stooping down to gather them up, some white men came out of a boat, and took me away."⁶⁵

White men opposed to slavery seem to have been captive to the black man's body and to the physical likeness between black and white. In 1803, Rhode Island slaveholder turned abolitionist Moses Brown interpreted a black man with white marks on his skin as "evidence of the sameness of human nature and corresponding with the declaration of the Apostle, that, 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men.'" Brown found likeness to the "easy and agreeable" Henry Moss through the black man's body: "His back below his shoulders is mostly as white as white people of his age, as are parts of his breast and even his nipples. The white parts of his skin and especially his anus are so transparent as to show the veins [*sic*] as distinct, as a white mans [*sic*]." Julie Ellison has accurately noted that "sensibility" encouraged attention to "the body [of] color," along with hope for an encounter defined by "interper-

⁶⁴"Narrative of a Negro Servant," pp. 65–66.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 60.

sonal transparency." Here in the writings of white antislavery men on black men is invoked a transparency of the body as well as of the consciousness. The white man's benevolence to the black man seems inevitably to involve the latter's body.⁶⁶

Revolutionary republicanism taught Americans that benevolence is the unifying force of society and that benevolence helps gird the virtuous man to fight against oppression. Republican ideology, liberal religion, and Calvinist orthodoxy all led Americans to believe that while monarchy had traditionally united society through authority, cruelty, and force, a new society in the United States could cohere by means of the natural benevolence inherent in humankind. The same newspapers that printed white-penned narratives of young black men in the 1790s told readers that "society being formed, it becomes essentially necessary that universal benevolence founded on the true principle of friendship should be its base and support."⁶⁷ "Friendship," Americans were encouraged to believe, "is the grand tie of society."⁶⁸ An analogy between black loyalty and republican loyalty reveals the heart of the matter. The tale of "Scipio" told of a teen-aged slave so "greatly attached" to his master's son, with whom he had been reared, that he presciently refuses to trust a nurse hired to care for the sick white boy.⁶⁹ When the nurse fails in her duty, Scipio, concealed under the boy's bed, comes to the rescue. Scipio's loyalty is likened to that of the "Patriots" during the War of Independence—the heart of the matter in white thinking about blacks and benevolence.

Between 1790 and 1820, antislavery writings represented intimacy between a black man and a white man with the sentimentalist vocabulary of benevolence: affection, attachment, brotherhood, disinterestedness, friendship, heart, intimacy, love, sentiment, sympathy, and tenderness. This antislavery writing usually noted that while slavery violates a natural right to liberty, it is also an abnegation of benevolence. According to this critique, which shared little with the individualistic abolitionism of the antebellum decades, the black must be either the slave or the friend of the white. Lamenting the cruelty of slavery, a 1791 newspaper article stated the essence of this critique: "The Negro has no friends."⁷⁰ Anti-

⁶⁶Moses Brown Anti-Slavery Papers, 1803 folder, Rhode Island Historical Society; Ellison (n. 2 above), pp. 447–49. For Moses Brown and other Quaker opponents of slavery, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1828* (Ithaca, NY, 1975), pp. 213–54.

⁶⁷"On Friendship," *Herald of Vermont* 1 (July 23, 1792): 4.

⁶⁸"Friendship," *Vergennes Gazette* 2 (February 27, 1800): 4.

⁶⁹"Fidelity; or, Scipio, the Negro Boy," *Christian Messenger* 1 (March 12, 1817): 196; also printed in *Boston Recorder* 2 (January 7, 1817): 38.

⁷⁰"A Fragment," *Morning Ray* 1 (November 29, 1791): 3.

slavery writers of the 1790s, moreover, sought to emphasize an irony they perceived in slavery. Blacks, they were often convinced, are especially benevolent and sympathetic, but are not accepted within the circuit of society. Thus, white Americans in the postrevolutionary decades were in the remarkably complex situation of hearing that republican society could cohere only through benevolence, while they were living with blacks, whose enslavement and oppression surely violated benevolence and likeness and yet who were like whites in language, religion, and sex and were even commonly believed to be especially benevolent.

Defenses of slavery of the revolutionary era and the early republic shared with antislavery writing the sentimentalist presuppositions about the unifying force of benevolence but presupposed that affection and the other ties that unite individuals could not cross the race line. This defense of slavery was not an abandonment of sentimentalism—indeed its major spokesman, Jefferson, was both slaveholder and sentimentalist—but rather it was a revelation of the grim face of sentimentalism. Society must enslave or banish those who cannot join it benevolently, reasoned Jefferson as he affirmed Montesquieu's arguments of the middle of the eighteenth century. The accumulated cruelties of slavery and the seemingly natural differences between black and white suggested to a critical mass of Americans that blacks were better slaves than free. Almost never did eighteenth-century Americans defending slavery claim that slavery is ultimately just. Rather, they claimed that blacks and whites, separated by past cruelties and by nature and, thus, unable to coexist benevolently in a free society, would turn on each other. Slavery's justice, therefore, was provisional. For only colonization—the expatriation of black Americans to Africa or the Caribbean—would allow manumission, reasoned the American defenders of slavery. Such Americans could reveal their concern with black sexuality, whether in the notion that black men are more "amorous" or in the fear that miscegenation would become even more widespread in a free society in the Southern states than it was in a slave society. It was a commonplace of the day that liberating American slaves would lead to "a general commixture" and "Ethiopians [in] sexual intercourse with the whites" were the freed slaves to remain in the United States.⁷¹ Indeed, this fear of future miscegenation, especially in the South, was a tacit affirmation of the desirability of the black male, since a slave society already offered white men considerable access to black women and any great increase in miscegenation would likely then be intercourse between black men and white women.

Erotic representations of black men by white men are not records of

⁷¹ "On the Moral and Political Effects of Negro Slavery," *Middlebury Mercury* 2 (July 6, 1803): 1-2. See also Jonathan Edwards, Jr., *The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave-Trade*,

sexual activity but, rather, records of beliefs and feelings.⁷² The beliefs and feelings inscribed in these representations resulted from an encounter of white men, who were heirs and affiliates of sentimentalism, republicanism, and Christianity, with black men, who represented to white men a peculiar "other"—like yet unlike, compatriot yet slave, masculine by nature yet by society restricted as lovers, husbands, fathers, and citizens. Erotic representations of black men by white men resulted from a rupture in the national (or hegemonic) discussion of race and slavery in postrevolutionary America. The major spokesmen for white America proclaimed that benevolence could never exist between black and white in America. Democratic-Republican or Federalist, deist or orthodox, Americans like Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, James Madison, Samuel Hopkins, and Jonathan Edwards, Jr., believed that blacks and whites could never share the likeness and the unity of common sense and experience required for benevolent relations.⁷³ Separation of the races, not benevolent association, was the standard of white leaders in postrevolutionary America. The means of this separation was to be the expatriation of black Americans to Africa or the Caribbean, and its fruit was the American Colonization Society. Despite this standard, there is considerable evidence that white Americans saw a likeness within black Americans, a likeness whose recognition they usually suppressed, perhaps because of guilt about slavery, or a reluctance to share with an underclass the benefits of their new society, or ambivalent feeling about blacks as at once near and far, an "other" to white Americans. Even Jefferson, for instance, considered blacks to be natural republicans and Benjamin Banneker to be a true scientist—an ideal to which Jefferson himself aspired.⁷⁴

As a new object of discourse, the black male body entered through a rupture in republican discourse about slavery. The white experience of likeness in blacks—feeling benevolence for them, recognizing their re-

and of the Slavery of the Africans (Providence, RI, 1792), pp. 35–37, for the necessary choice between miscegenation and separation after the end of slavery.

⁷²Thomas W. Lacqueur is obviously right in noting that discourse about sexual activity is quite different from the activity itself ("Sexual Desire and the Market Economy during the Industrial Revolution," in *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, ed. Domna C. Stanton [Ann Arbor, MI, 1992], p. 200).

⁷³Drew R. McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy* (New York, 1989), pp. 277–303.

⁷⁴For Jefferson on blacks' natural republicanism, see Lipscomb and Bergh, eds. (n. 5 above), 1:72–73. An excellent analysis of Jefferson's ambivalent feelings about blacks, touching on his thoughts about Banneker, is Frank Shuffelton, "Thomas Jefferson: Race, Culture, and the Failure of the Anthropological Method," in *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (New York, 1993), pp. 257–77.

publican desire for liberty, worshipping the same God—could not be entirely suppressed, even if it could be barred from standard forms of social thought and religion. One participant at a revival well indicated how the presence of blacks could be marginalized but not suppressed. He “cried out . . . ‘God is among the people’” as he saw “prostrate on the ground . . . the learned pastor, the steady patriot, and the obedient son, crying ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.’” Then he listed those he saw in succession as he cast his “eyes a few paces” on and on. After the men were the women praising God, after the women were the worst sinners now converted, and after the worst sinners, at the limit of the sanctified, was “the poor oppressed African with his soul liberated, longing to be with his God.”⁷⁶ Neither in black writing nor in the white imagination would the figure of the black male remain at the margin, but came instead to the center to address the issue of masculine likeness. When William’s minister brought the black man bodily as well as spiritually into the circle of benevolence, he emphasized their sameness: “The religion of Jesus is everywhere the same. Its real possessors, whether black or white, all use the same language—all are actuated by the same love and animated by the same hopes through faith in the same Savior.”⁷⁶ Like William’s minister, some white American men, even a determined expatriationist like Jefferson, found black men “like” themselves, an experience of likeness “not easy to be expressed” precisely because it was effectively barred from white discourse. Blurring the line between benevolent and erotic feelings, representations of the black male body became the means of saying what otherwise could barely be said, for the body of one man possesses an undeniable likeness to that of another. Representations of the black male body allowed physical equality to hint of political equality, while homoeroticism hinted of the likeness and benevolence that might join black and white.⁷⁷

This black male, eroticized and republicanized, reveals something essential in postrevolutionary American ideology. Black and masculine, the first body to be so fully represented in American publications revealed

⁷⁶“Religious Intelligencer,” *Vermont Mercury* 1 (May 10, 1802): 2. Albert J. Rabreau notes that worship of the same God implied an egalitarianism across the race line (“Slave Autonomy and Religion,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 38 [1981–82]: 51–64, and “The Slave Church in the Era of the American Revolution,” in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman [Charlottesville, VA, 1983], pp. 196–211).

⁷⁶“Narrative of a Negro Servant,” p. 59.

⁷⁷Smith-Rosenberg (n. 1 above) has argued that the idea of the black slave was used by white Americans to define and stabilize, by way of contrast, the idea of a middle-class individual, free and productive (pp. 861–62). The likeness recorded in the texts I discuss here threatened to subvert that contrast, so discussion of black-white likeness was pushed out of postrevolutionary white discourse.

the masculine likeness on which revolutionary republicanism was grounded, the likeness that became either threatening or inviting when it crossed between black and white. The republican literati recognized this likeness by acknowledging black men's natural republicanism and their alleged desires for white women, but explained the threat such likeness posed to the republic by arguing that the historic cruelties of slavery would always undermine a black-and-white republic. Republicans sought to expatriate blacks precisely to preserve the likeness required by American republicanism, but the figure of black man himself—oppressed, like white men, and impossible to banish—helped to upset the precarious balance of late eighteenth-century American thought.

Long noted by historians, this precariousness has been attributed to the republican effort to balance civic virtue and commercial development as well as natural aristocracy and participatory democracy.⁷⁸ But this precariousness derived also from the republican insistence on setting black against white in a sentimental system of ideas and values. As antislavery pamphlets and newspaper writings of the era demonstrate, this balance could not be maintained in a slave society nor, as leading republicans apprehensively recognized, in a postslavery republic. The black man served to disrupt republican ideology because he was too close to white men—too close to the affections, too much a republican—in a system of ideas and values demanding that he be separate. The response of leading republicans to the existence of the black man—expatriate him and other blacks to Africa—was so impractical that some other adjustment, ideological if not geographical, was seemingly required.

Liberal individualism, well known as a response to new economic, political, and geographical circumstances in the new republic, was also a readjustment of thought about slavery, race, and the future of a multiracial America. Liberal individualism recast the abolitionist understanding of slavery—no longer a violation of benevolence, but an infringement upon an individual's natural liberty. Liberal individualism allowed Americans to jettison the notion, on which eighteenth-century thought about race rested, that the black man is inevitably either slave or friend to the white by replacing it with the notion that an ex-slave

⁷⁸The most distinguished commentary on commercial development and participatory democracy in postrevolutionary America is that of Joyce Appleby: "The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology," *Journal of American History* 54 (1978): 935-58, "What Is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?" *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982): 287-309, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 58 (1982): 833-49, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984), "Republicanism and Ideology," *American Quarterly* 37 (1985): 461-73, and "Republicanism in New and Old Contexts," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (1986): 20-34.

rather would be another atomistic individual in a free society.⁷⁹ As Americans came to realize that blacks and whites would inhabit the same continent but could share little of the benevolence esteemed in eighteenth-century theology and social thought, revolutionary republicanism died and liberal individualism quickened.

The black man stirred questions about the possibilities of sentiment and liberty. Leslie A. Fiedler has argued that the "relationship between a white man and a colored one" has been homocroticized because the colored man represents white men's desire for uncivilized freedom, "a life of impulse and instinct," a life that cannot be conceived heterosexually. This, in relation to black men, is wrong, and it has led to Fiedler's error in writing that "the Negro is a late comer to our literature, who has had to be adapted to the already existing image of the original Noble Savage. Our greatest Negro characters, including Nigger Jim, are, at their most moving moments, red men in blackface."⁸⁰ In his own right and in the white imagination, the black man is his own figure in American writing and thought, not a derivative of the Indian. At the transition from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, the black man represented in one part of the white imagination not uncivilized freedom but the eros and union of sentiment. William and his minister in the covenant for union, not a wild freedom. Paradoxically, the black man stirred questions about sentiment and liberty in a time when white Americans were not only developing a new notion of freedom, free from the sentimental conditions of republicanism, but also groping toward a new, liberal ethos of race relations, one made inevitable by the impracticality of expatriation.

⁷⁹Louis S. Gerteis, *Morality and Utility in American Antislavery Reform* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1987), pp. 20-22; and Daniel J. McInerney, "'A Faith for Freedom': The Political Gospel of Abolitionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 11 (1991): 374-75.

⁸⁰Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. ed. (New York, 1966), pp. 159, 339, 366, 375-77.