# “All the World’s a Stage”

Honor, Shame, and Publicity in US Relations with the Barbary States, 1785–1805

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Marius Kleinknecht

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1. Gutachter: Prof. Dr. Sebastian Jobs

2. Gutachter: Prof. Dr. Sönke Kunkel

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## A Note on Citation

All quotes appear in their original form, even if these include spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, or incorrect punctuation. The use of the otherwise common "sic" has been omitted. To insert these injunctions at every instance in which quotations violate modern-day spelling conventions would have necessitated incessant editorial interruptions of certain passages which is why they are not included. In addition, all uses of italics within quotes are taken from the original unless noted otherwise. Underlined passages (particularly common in William Eaton's correspondence) are likewise taken from the original.

Many of the primary source quotations in this dissertation feature long and complex sentences, common for the period under examination. In the interest of both clarity and brevity, some quotations have been shortened or editorialized. All injunctions in square brackets were added by the author. Three dots (". . .") indicate an omission of words from a quoted passage.

## Abbreviations

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| *Emerging Nation* | *The Emerging Nation: A Documentary History of the Foreign Relations of the United States under the Articles of Confederation, 1780–1789* |
| HL | Huntington Library, San Marino, California |
| NARA | National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland |
| *Naval Documents* | *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers* |
| *PTJ* | *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* |

## Introduction

When the Treaty of Paris formally ended the American Revolutionary War on September 3, 1783, statesmen of the newly independent nation faced challenges beyond domestic politics. They also had to lay the groundwork for diplomatic relations with other countries. These beginnings have been thoroughly documented and analyzed by historians. However, whereas most of these publications focus on early American foreign policy with European countries, the diplomatic history of the United States with other parts of the world has received far less attention.

In this thesis, US relations with the so-called Barbary States will be examined. Situated in North Africa, these were the (nominally) Ottoman regencies of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli as well as the independent Kingdom of Morocco. For centuries, these four states had engaged in the practice of preying on European merchant vessels in the Mediterranean and enslaving the crews of these ships. European countries were compelled to either individually ransom captured sailors or pay an annual tribute to prevent the theft of their subjects altogether. US politicians were confronted with this impediment to Mediterranean trade only after the American colonies lost British naval protection as a consequence of the war with Great Britain.

In 1784, an American merchant ship was captured by Moroccan cruisers. By 1785, the crews of another two American vessels were held captive in Algiers. By 1793, over one hundred additional Americans fell prey to Algerian corsairs and were subsequently brought to that regency. In response, Congress elected to construct a small navy to prepare for war against Algiers. Yet briefly thereafter, diplomacy prevailed, and in 1796, the captives in Algiers were ransomed. Between 1796 and 1800, diplomatic relations with the Barbary States were comparatively calm, as treaties with all four Barbary States were gradually negotiated. However, by 1801, the United States fought a war against the regency of Tripoli that would last for four years and cost the Jefferson administration considerable amounts of money and resources.

Throughout this entire period, both the rhetoric and policies of Americans involved in foreign relations with the Barbary States were exceptionally pugnacious. Early on, American captives in Algiers as well as politicians in the United States recommended war as a response to the capture of merely twenty-one American citizens. In subsequent years, bellicose sentiments and calls for bombardments were a constant feature in the correspondence of American diplomats stationed in North Africa. Later, during the war with Tripoli, the US naval presence in the Mediterranean was gradually increased in an effort to force the Bashaw of

Tripoli into submission. In addition to a prolonged bombing campaign, the US even attempted to overthrow the government of Tripoli, when American-led land forces invaded a Tripolitan city to reinstate the bashaw's older brother in an attempted coup d'état.

All of this prompts the following question: why did Americans approach the issue of Barbary corsairing so differently when compared to, for example, many European countries who had been in the habit of paying tribute and ransom for centuries? In this dissertation, it will be argued that the concept of honor was a central component of American foreign policy with the Barbary States. Establishing, maintaining, and protecting notions of both personal and national honor frequently contributed to rhetoric aimed at pursuing a distinctly aggressive US foreign policy as well as to the subsequent implementation thereof.

An analysis from this perspective is a comparatively new approach. For a long time, US foreign policy with the Barbary States has been treated by many historians as more of a curiosity relegated to footnotes in extensive studies primarily concerned with European relations. However, there has been a recent surge in publications concerned with these North African regencies. In part, this trend may be interpreted as a reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent scholarly interest in American relations with predominantly Muslim countries. Some of these publications have been polemical and reactionary, whereas others can be described as novelesque retellings of purportedly heroic military operations. There are few publications that even attempt to thoroughly investigate or explain underlying assumptions and logics of US foreign policy with the Barbary States.

Of those studies which do attempt to provide some level of historical interpretation, a few draw direct parallels between modern-day terrorism and the Barbary States. Joseph Wheelan's *Jefferson's War: America' First War on Terror, 1801–1805* not only alludes to post-9/11 US foreign policy in the title, the author explicitly states that "in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks on Washington and New York, the United States found itself in a new war much like the one two centuries earlier."[1] And while comparatively few scholars have drawn parallels between the twenty-first century and the early republic as distinctly as Wheelan, numerous publications have emphasized the supposed exoticism of North Africans, thereby suggesting "an implicit solidarity between the Americans of the early republic and those of the present day – a timeless 'us' defined by its difference from a North African 'them.'"[2]

[1] Joseph Wheelan, *Jefferson's War: America's First War on Terror, 1801–1805* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), xxvi. The historian Linda Colley has put forth similar comparisons between modern forms of terrorism and Barbary corsairing. See Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 50–51.

[2] Hannah Farber, "Millions for Credit: Peace with Algiers and the Establishment of America's Commercial Reputation Overseas, 1795–96," *Journal of the Early Republic* 34 (2014): 189.

Some scholars have also considered the role of religion in this context. In the 1931 landmark study of diplomatic relations between the US and the Barbary States (which is frequently cited by historians to this day), the historian Ray W. Irwin suggested that "the millennium-old conflict between Christians and Mohamedans could not easily be forgotten."[3] In spite of the secular US Constitution and secular politics of many statesmen at the time (especially Thomas Jefferson), a more recent study suggested that at least on the "popular level . . . many Americans seem to have viewed the contest with the North Africans as a spiritual battle."[4] However, most scholars take a measured approach to questions of religion, and there are virtually no publications that would suggest that US foreign policy was informed primarily by religious fervor.

Taking into account these previous interpretations, other scholars have proposed economic explanations for US foreign policy with the Barbary States.[5] Most prominently, this view is espoused by Frank Lambert in *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World*: "the Barbary Wars were primarily about trade, not theology."[6] Other scholars have concurred that the purpose of US foreign policy at the time was "obviously an economic one"[7] or concluded that "the [United States] government thought the trade worth a war."[8] This argument is convincing in light of the fact that the Barbary States obviously affected American commerce in the Mediterranean. After all, North Africans repeatedly captured US merchant ships throughout the republic's early years.

As such, there is no reason to doubt that the notion of protecting American commerce in the Mediterranean played some role in early US diplomatic history. However, an over-emphasis on economic factors conceivably runs the risk of projecting contemporary logics of foreign relations onto historical actors multiple centuries ago. This holds true especially when one considers that there is a strong argument to be made that the payment of annual tribute –

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[3] Ray W. Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776–1816* (Jefferson, North Carolina & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 3. Concurring with this view, another scholar has described the Barbary States as the "scourge of Christendom," See Paul W. Bamford, *The Barbary Pirates, Victims and the Scourge of Christendom* (Minneapolis: The Associates of the James Ford Bell Library, 1972), 4.

[4] Thomas S. Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims From the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 22.

[5] Even in the otherwise hagiographic account of William Eaton's role in the war against Tripoli, Chipp Reid concedes that "although there have been many attempts to cast the Tripoli war as a first battle against radical Islam, it was in fact an economic, not religious conflict." See Chipp Reid, *To the Walls of Derne: William Eaton, the Tripoli Coup and the End of the First Barbary War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2017), 5.

[6] Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 8.

[7] Daniel Panzac, *Barbary Corsairs: The End of a Legend, 1800–1820* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2005), 101.

[8] John J. McCusker, "Worth a War? The Importance of Trade between British America and the Mediterranean" in *Rough Waters: American Involvement with the Mediterranean in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Silvia Marzagalli, James R. Sofka, and John J. McCusker (St. Johns, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2010), 22.

despite the many uncertainties attached to this practice – constituted a far less costly alternative to the construction of warships or even the fighting of a naval war across an ocean.[9] From this perspective, important aspects of US foreign policy with the Barbary States cannot solely be explained by an ostensibly "rational" or economically driven cost-benefit analysis.

Of course, the interpretative lenses through which foreign policy can be analyzed can vary substantially. The quest for material *interests*, like the protection of trade, possibly informs and motivates actors to carry out foreign policy in certain ways with regard to certain countries. The want of resources, the cultivation of land, the quest for military power to ensure security from invasion, as well as the aspiration to provide prosperity for the people all constitute further examples gravitating toward interest that likely have an influence on virtually any country's foreign policy maker at virtually any given point in history.

In addition to such (comparatively) "tangible" factors, foreign relations may also be informed by ideology. For example, religious zeal may motivate individuals to act in ways which cannot be reconciled with behavior based on material interests alone. Another such ideological motivation is the advancement and/or protection of notions of (national) honor. The idea of taking seriously the concept of honor as a valid lens through which to view early modern discourse is a relatively recent phenomenon. One scholar has summarized the state of research thusly: "For most of the modern era, the idea of honor as a code of conduct has been treated as at best a historical curiosity and at worst a primitive and violent value system. But in recent decades there has been a resurgence of scholarly interest of a more charitable sort in the idea of honor."[10] By utilizing and advancing the theories proposed by recent scholarship, this dissertation seeks to build on this interest and make a meaningful contribution to the field.

Overall, the central aim of this thesis is multi-layered. On a fundamental level, it constitutes an attempt to investigate US relations with the Barbary States which is a somewhat neglected area of study in diplomatic and cultural history. More specifically, this dissertation is going to address the role of the notion of honor within this field of research. From a conceptual standpoint, the idea of honor is divided into two levels of analysis. Firstly, the idea of *personal* honor is explored, for the most part, via a case study. The extant writings of James Leander Cathcart, an American captive-turned-diplomat will serve as the foundation for this analysis.

[9] The war with Tripoli cost approximately $3.5. million, whereas the annual tribute to the most powerful Barbary State (Algiers) amounted to merely $21,000. (Thus, even if it is granted that the full expenses of war can rarely be known beforehand, it would have been obvious that tribute was cheaper than warfare.) See Michael S. Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States at War: A History of American Relations with the Barbary States, 1785–1805* (Jefferson, North Carolina & London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1993), 179.
[10] Whitley Kaufman, "Understanding Honor," *Social Theory and Practice* 37 (2011): 557.

Secondly, there will be an analysis of the role of *national* honor. The correspondence of American politicians, diplomats, and naval officers are instrumental for this purpose.

There are numerous reasons for selecting James Cathcart's writings for the foundation of a study in personal honor. James Cathcart was involved in foreign policy for nearly the entire period of early US engagement with the Barbary States. He was held captive in Algiers from 1785 to 1795. Therefore, he had firsthand experience of the North African system of captivity, tribute, and ransom. Afterward, Cathcart served as American consul to Tripoli. This dissertation's main contention is that Cathcart's journals and correspondence constitute a prolonged and ambitious effort to first establish and later preserve his status as a person of honor in the eyes of his peers. As will be shown, his effort largely resulted from the supposed shame of his enslavement and desires to overcome this shame by becoming a person of influence, both directly in Algiers during his captivity, in the United States, and subsequently in Tripoli.

Notably, Cathcart's efforts were repeatedly disappointed, as the claims Cathcart expressed about his status often went unrecognized. This resulted in a plethora of inflammatory letters as well as numerous personal conflicts throughout his career. In this, these writings offer a distinctly different perspective than, say, many of the diplomats and noteworthy naval officers who served during the Tripolitan War and received widespread recognition and praise at the time.[11] Rather, Cathcart's correspondence includes reactions to situations where claims about personal honor were frequently denied or ignored which often led to expressions of shame turning into aggression.

However, it should be noted that James Cathcart's stated experiences were not necessarily representative of broader parts of the American population. In fact, Cathcart's career was certainly extraordinary, as captivity in Barbary was a relatively rare phenomenon, particularly for US citizens.[12] And yet, Cathcart corresponded with his fellow diplomats, members of the State Department, as well as naval officers throughout his career. His repeated utilization of the language of honor in these contexts would then point to shared cultural norms which in these cases emphasize the importance of the concept of honor for foreign policy makers during America's formative years following independence. Even if an individual did not personally "feel" infractions on personal honor (this is of course impossible to measure or verify from a historical perspective), letters by Cathcart can nevertheless be interpreted as

[11] Moreover, the exploits of many of these "heroes" (William Eaton, Stephen Decatur, Edward Preble) have already been well documented by numerous historians.

[12] In total, approximately 700 Americans were captives on the North African coast at some point or another in the years after American independence.

examples of writing *strategies* that aim at convincing recipients by invoking shared, high-minded, and yet abstract conceptions – in this case, honor.

An analysis of James Cathcart's writing also highlights the importance of personal honor in the arena of foreign relations. As will be shown, Cathcart served as an informal diplomat even during his captivity in Algiers. He later returned to the Barbary Coast as an official government agent. Given the vast geographical distance between the United States and the Mediterranean, letters often took weeks (sometimes months) to cross the Atlantic. Individual diplomats were given a tremendous amount of leeway in how to best represent the United States abroad. Therefore, it would be misleading to characterize US foreign policy at the time as predominantly state-centered. In other words, it is exceedingly difficult to describe the United States – as a whole – as having pursued a coherent foreign policy. Instead, "early modern foreign relations were managed by agents who, by serving their rulers, also pursued their own personal interests, or those of their family, friends, clientele or locality."[13] To investigate the importance of personal honor for these diplomats thus contributes to a more general understanding of how foreign policy was conducted at this time.

And yet, conceptions of honor were not only described on a personal level. Virtually all of those involved in US diplomacy (and later war) with the Barbary States frequently invoked the notion of *national* honor in their correspondence, journals, and in some instances even in ship logbooks. In this dissertation, it is argued that the notion of honor, together with all its related concepts (e.g. shame and humiliation), constitutes a central theme in the writings of numerous American statesmen, diplomats, naval officers, as well as members of the merchant marine. Defending the (essentially amorphous) concept of national honor, it will be demonstrated, allowed Americans to first rhetorically justify and subsequently enact a distinctly aggressive foreign policy toward the Barbary States. As such, the emphasis on national honor may serve to explain how and why early US foreign relations differed substantially from European approaches to the issue of Barbary corsairing.

It is important to note that, for a variety of reasons, this study does not attempt to investigate the role of the American public in this context. For one, there are already numerous studies which have sought to analyze the impact of US relations with the Barbary States on the American public.[14] Lawrence A. Peskin's *Captives and Countrymen*, for example, has

[13] Nadine Amsler, Henrietta Harrison, and Christian Windler, "Introduction: Eurasian Diplomacies Around 1800: Transformation and Persistence," *The International History Review* 41 (2019): 943.

[14], See, for example, Gary E. Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations, 1784–1796: The Public Response," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (1982) and Lotfi Ben Rejeb, "'To the Shores of Tripoli': The Impact of Barbary on Early American Nationalism," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1982).

investigated the ways in which the prolonged conflicts with the Barbary States have informed an emerging American national identity. Other publications have also recounted how American newspapers described the more salient events taking place in the Mediterranean.[15] Given the abundance of these existing analyses, there is little this dissertation could contribute to the understanding of how the American *public sphere* reacted to early American foreign policy with the Barbary States.

Furthermore, this study addresses underlying assumptions of US foreign policy. To include the American public in this endeavor would then necessitate the supposition that one can even speak of *one* American public, undivided along racial, economic, and geographic lines. Moreover, one would have to demonstrate that this American public actively sought to exercise influence on US foreign policy. While American statesmen were of course subject to real and imagined public pressures, there is simply not much evidence to suggest that the broader public directly contributed to the ways in which US foreign policy with the Barbary States was conducted.[16] For these reasons, this study is mostly concerned with those actors who were directly involved in US foreign affairs.

The number of persons directly involved in foreign policy might initially appear somewhat limited and was certainly not representative of the general American public (if indeed such a thing existed). However, this is not to say that the groups that are the subjects of analysis for this dissertation were not diverse in other ways – even when it is readily granted that they were almost exclusively white men. Foreign policy with the Barbary States was shaped by individuals of various classes and backgrounds. For example, the first Americans to be held captive in Algiers were mostly common sailors. As Lawrence Peskin has argued, a "remarkable aspect of captivity as a form of cultural interaction is that it was frequently the province of nonelites."[17] Nevertheless, these "nonelites" were actively involved in diplomatic endeavors, even during their captivity. In part because of their experience, two former captives – namely James Cathcart and Richard O'Brien – were subsequently appointed as consuls to Tripoli and

[15] See Jason Raphael Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates: Adventures in Sexuality, State-Building, and Nationalism, 1784–1815," (PhD diss., University of California, 2016) and David J. Dzurec III, *Our Suffering Brethren: Foreign Captivity and Nationalism in the Early United States* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019).

[16] Indeed, the historian Jasper Trautsch has argued that the opposite was sometimes the case. For example, when Federalists quite skillfully exploited popular outrage to justify a belligerent foreign policy with France in the wake of the so-called XYZ Affair. In this instance, then, foreign policy makers exercised influence *on* the public through the controlled publication of information in American newspapers. See Jasper Trautsch, *The Genesis of America: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Formation of National Identity, 1793–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 107–130.

[17] Lawrence A. Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785–1816*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 212.

Algiers. Throughout this entire period, they frequently corresponded with numerous high-ranking politicians, including John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison.[18] These, of course, are well-known historical figures who were undisputedly part of the political elite of the early republic.

During the war with Tripoli, the fledgling US Navy was deployed in the Mediterranean. The correspondence of naval officers provides further perspectives on American foreign relations at the time. These include viewpoints ranging from common sailors to US naval commanders. As members of the military, particularly higher-ranking naval officers might be argued to be part of an elite that was perhaps somewhat different from, say, aristocratic Virginian politicians such as Thomas Jefferson. In all, this dissertation thus still includes a variety of different perspectives to distill broader common assumptions under which US foreign policy with the Barbary States was both conceived and subsequently administered.[19]

In order to provide a thorough methodological framework for this dissertation, the succeeding section will first provide a definition of the term "honor" based on the current scholarly consensus. This includes conceptualizations of both *personal* and *national* honor. The main body of this study is divided into three parts: "Captivity," "Diplomacy," and "War." Arranged in chronological order, these address three distinct periods in early American diplomatic history with the Barbary States.

The first part (Captivity) primarily covers the years from 1785 to 1796 but also provides a very brief history of the Barbary States prior to and during the American Revolution. The primary focus, however, is on reactions to the first instances of American sailors being captured by Algerian cruisers. For this purpose, this part investigates two perspectives on American foreign policy. The first is how the US political elite reacted to the enslavement of American citizens shortly after the US had achieved independence. With a special focus on the correspondence of Thomas Jefferson – who was among the most prolific commentators on Barbary affairs at the time – these sections demonstrate that numerous American statesmen proposed a military response to Barbary corsairing in the Mediterranean. It will be argued that the main reasoning behind such a belligerent response was to introduce the United States as an honorable nation on the world stage by pursuing a markedly different foreign policy when compared to most European countries. However, despite these high-minded ambitions,

[18] Though not necessarily when these were president.

[19] The perspectives of the perceived antagonists of US foreign policy during this time – North Africans – is notably absent here. There are numerous reasons not to include these, however, a disinterest in these perspectives is certainly not among them. Instead, the extant primary sources of US foreign policy are overwhelmingly preserved in North American archives and therefore emphasize US viewpoints. Unfortunately, only very few Arabic sources remain that would provide insights into how the "other side" perceived and made sense of foreign policy.

American diplomats were ultimately forced to make enormous concessions to redeem the captive American citizens.

Secondly American perspectives from North Africa are taken into consideration. The remainder of the first part thus analyzes the writings of James Leander Cathcart, one of the captives in Algiers. This case study chiefly investigates how Cathcart described his captivity. More specifically, this section investigates how Cathcart addressed notions of shame (the *absence* of honor) as a result of his enslavement. Broadly speaking, these writings are here interpreted as an effort on behalf of Cathcart to rehabilitate his personal honor after being stripped of the freedom and agency of an American citizen. By invoking his nationality, Cathcart expressed concerns not only over his personal honor but also pondered broader symbolic ramifications inherent in America's inability to redeem him and his fellow captives. Cathcart's descriptions of his rise to a position of influence within the Algerian slave society as well as his involvement in the diplomatic efforts to negotiate a peace treaty serve as the foundation of this interpretation.

The second part (Diplomacy) is divided into numerous smaller sections which address the diplomatic relations with the Barbary States between the years 1796 and 1800, a comparatively peaceful period. The focus lies on the challenges the consuls faced in each regency and their relation to both personal and national honor. The American consul to Algiers, Richard O'Brien, was capable of managing US relations without many complications. As a result, his correspondence mostly addressed trivial maritime affairs. And yet, O'Brien frequently emphasized his diplomatic skills and thereby solidified his status as an honorable gentleman. By contrast, James Cathcart (now consul to Tripoli) was incapable of receiving recognition for many claims concerning his social rank, resulting in a prolonged rivalry with Richard O'Brien. As will be shown, their disputes were grounded in conflicts over their personal honor. Moreover, these conflicts occasionally influenced the relationship with the Barbary States as well.

William Eaton, a former soldier, served as consul to Tunis. Unlike his two colleagues who had been captives in Algiers, Eaton had no prior experience in North African diplomacy. He frequently expressed concerns about the honor of his home country. While all three consuls agreed that the United States should send a naval squadron to the Mediterranean, Eaton was perhaps the most forceful proponent of war with the Barbary States. In his correspondence, Eaton frequently characterized the payment of tribute as a national humiliation that required retribution. In this context, the concluding section of the second part also addresses the controversy surrounding the American frigate *George Washington*. The ship had been sent to

the Mediterranean to deliver outstanding US tribute to Algiers. Upon arrival, the Dey of Algiers requested that the vessel should sail under Algerian colors to Constantinople. Fearful of retaliation, the *George Washington's* captain obliged. American diplomats unanimously described the episode as an affront to US national honor. More generally, the second part also chronicles in how far Americans became increasingly belligerent in their calls to defend US national honor, as the US Navy gradually increased its fleet.

The third part (War) focuses on the so-called First Barbary War. From 1801 to 1805, the United States fought a naval war with the regency of Tripoli. Here, the role of national honor will be analyzed relative to the war's most noteworthy events. These include a naval victory against a Tripolitan warship; an attempted blockade by the US Navy; Tripolitans capturing an American frigate, the *USS Philadelphia*, and making its crew of 307 prisoners of war; Stephen Decatur's successful mission to destroy the *Philadelphia*; the bombardment of Tripoli; the American ship *Intrepid* exploding on a mission to infiltrate the Tripolitan harbor (killing ten Americans); the former American consul to Tunis, William Eaton, attempting to dethrone the reigning bashaw by reinstating the ruler's brother; and finally, the negotiation of a peace treaty, costing nearly $60,000.[20]

All these events were assessed by those involved at the time through the lens of national honor. Successes were regarded as having advanced the honor of the United States, whereas defeats were described as humiliating and shameful. The imagined *publicity* of these events – given the geographic proximity to European countries – in this context constituted an extremely important aspect to the understanding of national honor. More broadly, the conflict as a whole may also be interpreted as an escalation of the quest for the advancement of US national honor which had been initially justified by statesmen such as Thomas Jefferson as early as the 1780s and reinforced by US consuls throughout the late 1790s.

**Honor: Definitions of Past and Present Scholarship**

Before investigating US foreign policy under the lens of honor, it is requisite to explain the limitations of the term, to define what is understood when honor is invoked and what is not. In the following, it will be outlined how the idea of honor may be interpreted when discussing the time of the early republic. The conceptualization of personal honor presented here mostly applies to white men, and it will be explained in how far female and nonwhite

[20] In addition, the war with Tripoli coincided with end of James Cathcart's involvement in Barbary affairs.

conceptualizations of honor differed. The two main foci are personal honor and its extrapolation to the larger collective, the nation.

Of course, honor has a variety of meanings, connotations, and implications which may vary over time, across regions, and may ultimately depend on individual understanding. Therefore, the formulation of a universally valid definition is not attempted. It is rather the aim to establish a basic framework of those components that have been observed by a multitude of scholars in numerous contexts and have been described as "fairly stable."[21] Exceptions may be found to some or all aspects presented here, but by and large the following characterizations represent the current scholarly consensus on the basic elements that comprise notions of honor during the period under examination.

When discussing honor in an American context, the oeuvre of the late Bertram Wyatt-Brown provides a sound basis as a first point of departure. He was among the first historians of the United States to bring attention to the concept, asserting that "the Age of Reason was also an Age of Honor."[22] Wyatt-Brown's work is mostly associated with a regional emphasis on the Antebellum South. However, the theoretical framework he developed can be applied beyond that region, and some of his publications have expanded the concept of honor more generally.[23]

Wyatt-Brown's conceptualization was heavily influenced by *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (1966), a collection of essays edited by J.G. Peristiany. *Honour and Shame* is still commonly cited and counts among the most influential collections of studies on the concept of honor. While the book consists of theoretical conceptualizations and field studies with a focus on Mediterranean societies, the basic definition of honor remains the starting point for scholars of all backgrounds. In the book, honor is introduced as "the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of his [or her] society."[24]

Concurring with this view, Wyatt-Brown identifies three interconnected components that are incumbent in personal honor. Firstly, honor constitutes an "inner conviction of self-worth."[25] Secondly, this claim about the self is to be presented to a public. Lastly, there is "the assessment of the claim by the public, a judgment based upon the behavior of the claimant."[26] It is important to note, therefore, that honor is virtually never private and relies on the mutual

[21] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4.
[22] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s–1890s* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 32.
[23] See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *A Warring Nation: Honor, Race, and Humiliation in America and Abroad* (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2014).
[24] See, also Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status" in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. J.G. Peristiany (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 21.
[25] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 14.
[26] Ibid.

recognition of a given community.[27] Isolated claims about personal (or national) honor – without any kind public response in mind – would then be rendered essentially meaningless: "There would be no such thing as personal honor if there were only one man or woman in the world."[28] The reciprocity between personal claims to honor and recognition is usually referred to as the "internal" and "external" aspects of honor; there needs to be a social consensus on what types of behavior are validated as being honorable, so that the individual (or collective) may act accordingly.[29]

A first challenge, then, arises in identifying the "public" that evaluates honor claims. Intuitively, this public may represent the most immediate social group of the claimant. For the American gentry in particular, "an essential component of honor was to have the rank you claimed respected by those around you on the social scale."[30] This was not always a simple business and since one's honor is not easily quantifiable, this necessitated careful judgment calls. Take the example of George Washington whose maxims required that only visitors of equal social standing were to be offered the best guest room during their stay. Such an offer was to be refused once and subsequently accepted but only with an acknowledgment that one was undeserving of such generosity.[31] Such practices relied on the mutual understanding of the social status of everyone involved. In cases of misunderstanding, guests might be offended if they were not offered a certain room. Washington himself (or anyone in a similar position) also stood the chance of embarrassing himself by offering the best room to someone not their social equal. The immediate peer group thus was a crucial factor in the evaluation of one's honor.

But honor claims can also be intended to go beyond that group. For example, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Alexander Hamilton engaged in public honor disputes through the medium of newspapers.[32] While their publications were undoubtedly also intended for their respective peer group (the political elite), the readers of these newspapers participated in these conflicts as well.

Despite the publicity of such conflicts, social status remained a key component. It is particularly important for the evaluation of who is able to challenge someone else's honor. Generally speaking, if a challenge came from someone of comparatively lower societal status,

[27] See also Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," 21.
[28] Alexander Welsh, *What is Honor? A Question of Moral Imperatives* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2008), 211.
[29] Sometimes also referred to as "interior" and "exterior." See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 14.
[30] Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 38.
[31] Ibid.
[32] For a more thorough discussion on this practice, see Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), 105–158.

this might be ignored or dismissed as irrelevant.[33] "Affairs of honor, duels, were never fought across class lines. The insult of someone of a lower class was never a threat to one's honor."[34] While honor conflicts were only fought among social equals, the wider public was nevertheless important, acting as arbiter and declaring winners and losers.[35]

The case of the United States may even be regarded as somewhat more complicated in this regard. With the establishment of the American republic, the quasi-aristocratic political elite was still vulnerable to *aggregated* attacks by their constituencies. "After all, public accountability was at the heart of republican governance, particularly for national officeholders."[36] This was an important difference to most European forms of government where politicians were perhaps a little more at liberty to ignore public opinion while retaining their honor within aristocratic circles. This may seem like a minor aspect but is of importance, particularly when analyzing foreign policy which, in the United States, was now subject to more widespread public scrutiny.

For politicians such as the Founding Fathers, even posterity was perceived as a potential arbiter in disputes of honor. Many members of the United States political elite were aware of the unique place in history they occupied and acted accordingly: "To America's self-conscious founders, historical dishonor was the ultimate threat, condemning its victims to an eternity of abuse. A lifetime of work, sacrifice, and vigilant protection of one's reputation could be undone with the stroke of a pen."[37] Therefore, the audiences for which honor claims were made were not necessarily imminent and were imagined just as much as they were material.[38]

Publics can then be found in immediate peer groups (family, friends, colleagues, city communities), broader audiences (newspapers readers in particular), and future opinions. Honor thus becomes "an *intensely* public thing, and when it is in transition a fundamental question stands out: Who is the audience? More pertinent, who are the audiences?"[39] In this study these various audiences are taken into consideration, as well as the authors, to evaluate patterns.

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[33] "A peasant does not threaten to take honor from the king by shouting an insult at him, and when the king beheads the peasant, it is for insubordination, not as a riposte designed to defend honor." See Zeba Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 18 (2009): 593.
[34] Peter A. French, "Honor Shame, Identity," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 16 (2002): 4.
[35] Sometimes referred to as "public court of reputation" or "PCR." See Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," 593.
[36] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 32.
[37] Ibid., 273.
[38] Of course, the "community," i.e. the nation, is also by and large imagined. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 1983). But unlike future generations, these publics were at least capable of responding to honor claims in one way or another.
[39] Emphasis added. John Mayfield, "The Marketplace of Values: Honor and Enterprise in the Old South" in *The Field of Honor: Essays on Southern Character and American Identity*, ed. John Mayfield and Todd Hagstette (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 17.

Such patterns emerge whenever "people in a given place and time were amused, disgusted, or frightened in similar ways on similar occasions, [because] this suggests larger shared assumptions that require exploration. Outrage and shock are particular useful indicators, revealing shared standards through their violation."[40] As honor is imagined and therefore impossible to empirically measure or quantify, as well as almost always thought to subsist without the need to emphasize its existence, the aforementioned "outrage and shock" are indeed extremely helpful, because they often give rise to honor claims. As will be shown, honor is most often invoked, whenever there is a perception that it is being encroached upon.

The fact that honor claims are often made in situations where honor is perceived to be violated reveals another important point: honor is almost always presupposed or assumed. It is consequently mostly felt in its absence. There are exceptions to this, of course, and certain groups (discussed below) are thought of as having no honor at all. But for those within a certain social group, honor is generally taken for granted and socially recognized a priori. This is referred to as "ascribed" honor. It differs from "acquired" honor which manifests itself through action and behavior and can be gained or lost.[41]

Within this field of reflexive assessment, honor must also be described as a system of order and hierarchy which "competes with love and religion in shaping rules by which we live."[42] In this system, shared assumptions elevate those assigned with more honor to the top of the social structure where they may exercise power. Conversely, those with less honor are ranked within the lower stratum of a given power structure or excluded altogether. As Wyatt-Brown puts it, "since earliest times, honor was inseparable from hierarchy and entitlement, defense of family blood and community needs. All the exigencies required the rejection of the lowly, the alien, and the shamed."[43] Whether it is considered on the personal or national level, hierarchy is a key component in understanding discourses surrounding honor. This hierarchy is structured by a public's judgment of honor claims.

However, honor is not synonymous with merely reputation.[44] This is because honor carries a positive connotation (and is therefore desirable), whereas reputation may be negative. One can have a "bad reputation," however, one cannot have "bad honor."[45] Likewise, honor is not fame whose antonym is obscurity; honor's antonym is dishonor, or shame, and shame, too,

[40] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 290.
[41] Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," 593.
[42] Welsh, *What is Honor?*, 211.
[43] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 3–4.
[44] This is an important addition to Wyatt-Brown's definition: "In other words honor is reputation." See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Culture*, 14.
[45] Courtney Erin Thomas, *If I Lose Mine Honour, I Lose Myself: Honor Among the Early Modern English Elite* (Toronto & London: The University of Toronto Press, 2017), 14.

is always public.[46] The public consequences of losing honor, the resulting shame, "relates to failures, shortcoming, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, and the unwanted exposure of weakness or the fear of such revelations."[47] When honor is invoked, it usually carries with it the prospect of shame, of *public* humiliation.

Therefore, the assessment of honor in any given discourse implies fear of losing honor and thus being humiliated and relinquishing social status (and subsequently power). The fear of public humiliation is a central component of honor:

> Honor is forward, open-faced, and outwardly trustful, *even if only a mask*, but the honor-conscious individual must show surprise at betrayal and express horror at the thought of vulnerability. If an honor-centered person is guilty of some wrong, his or her primary desire is to escape the implications of weakness and inferiority, the lash of contempt.[48]

It is not necessarily an individual's conscience of being "guilty" of some dishonorable deed, but the fear of their actions being made public that may prevent a person from an action or motivate another. (This is particularly important in the realm of foreign policy where "honorable reputation" may have to be rectified with *realpolitik*.)

Honor is thus a prime instigator of action. In the first place, it may motivate individuals to act in service of their personal honor. Additionally, fear of shame and humiliation might also cause one to take preventive measures. And lastly, the duel is perhaps one of the most well-known forms of restoring one's honor after a provocation and has been subject to a variety of studies.[49] All such actions follow the "codes of honor," patterns of behavior that must be adhered to in order to claim honor and have this honor be granted by the public.[50]

The pursuit to enhance or uplift personal honor may take many forms. Among the most well-known is perhaps proper conduct in war. In *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army*, Caroline Cox notes that "bravery in action was the most obvious way to be recognized as honorable. Men of all ranks gloried in their military accomplishments."[51] The military in particular provided opportunities for the lower classes to prove their worth on the battlefield and gain subsequent recognition. For quasi-aristocrats such

[46] Mayfield, "The Marketplace of Values," 8.
[47] French, "Honor, Shame, and Identity," 5.
[48] Emphasis added. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 155.
[49] See, for example, Ute Frevert, *Ehrenmänner: Das Duell in der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (München: C.H. Beck, 1991), Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), and Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*.
[50] Sharon R: Krause, *Liberalism with Honor* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 2.
[51] Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 39.

as the Founders, the accumulation of wealth and seeking public office were also actions taken in the pursuit of honor.[52]

The prevention of shame (dishonor), too, is an instigator for actions and behaviors of all kinds. In *Honor Bound: Race and Shame in America*, David Leverenz argues that fears of miscegenation motivated white slaveholders in the United States to "assert daily supremacy," for example by referring even to adult black slaves as "boy."[53] This symbolic emasculation, he contends, was an expression of the desire to protect white women from supposedly promiscuous black slaves. Such fears, Leverenz ultimately concludes, also make the idea of honor a mechanism of group demarcation.

Lastly, the duel is perhaps the most the most well-researched ritual when it comes to actions taken to restore personal honor. These "supreme tests of honor"[54] – risking one's life but also being willing to kill to rectify perceived insults to honor – are perhaps among the best illustrations of the very real consequences of such an abstract concept. In this context, dueling was less about winning or losing but more about proving that one was willing to die for one's honor.[55] Conversely, "the display of honor, then, is essentially theatrical."[56]

Since cultural practices are subject to change, conceptions of honor are never static.[57] What constitutes behavior that societies deem honorable may then even appear to be arbitrary. The early republic, for instance, was at first still under the influence of its colonial past:

> The culture of honor also reminds us that the American republic did not spring to life from the brow of Washington, fully formed. There were cultural and political rites, traditions and assumptions that Britain's North American colonists inherited and adapted on a distant stage. The tone of America's politics of reputation hearkens back to Britain as well.[58]

But new displays of honor could soon be *invented*,[59] ranging from dress codes for politicians[60] to celebrations on the 4th of July or George Washington's birthday.[61]

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[52] While honor certainly constituted an important factor, that is not to say that honor was necessarily the only motivation to do such things; especially wealth can also be an "end in itself." See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 17.
[53] David Leverenz, *Honor Bound: Race and Shame in America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey & London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 17.
[54] Mayfield, "The Marketplace of Values," 8.
[55] Frevert, *Ehrenmänner*, 11.
[56] Mayfield, "The Marketplace of Values," 8.
[57] Welsh, *What is Honor?*, xv.
[58] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 286.
[59] See Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, Eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
[60] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 43–48.
[61] See David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

But only because what constitutes honor is socially constructed does not mean that it does not have very real consequences. "Since honor gave meaning to lives, it existed not as a myth but as a vital code."[62] Adherence to these codes of honor was crucial, although these were adjusted over time.[63] Thus, it is attempted in this study to more precisely discern what was understood by "honor" by "identifying and interpreting patterns of thought and behavior among a select group of elite [and in this case non-elite] public figures."[64]

Thus far, honor has been treated as something attainable solely through actions or certain behaviors, without a discussion on societal restrictions and privileges. It may thus be useful to apply the aforementioned distinction between "ascribed" and "acquired" honor. The former is dependent on inherent attributes, such as ethnicity, gender, aristocratic lineage, etc. Certain people could claim or were awarded honor based on character traits inherent to them. "Acquired" honor, on the other hand, is dependent on actions and behavior.[65] It is therefore more unstable, as it may be gained and lost more easily. Lastly, groups may be excluded from possessing honor altogether, depending on a given society's constraints.

In the early United States, one such constraint was race. During the Revolutionary War, white and black soldiers fought side by side, and in some instances blacks were recognized for their honorable conduct on the battlefield.[66] However, this should be regarded as an exception and as a consequence of the relaxation of conventional social norms during times of war. "In America, whether considering male or female honor, the concept has largely been seen as an exclusively white ethic."[67] In the South, slavery was still ubiquitous. Orlando Patterson has argued that the foundation of slavery is the "social death" of the enslaved, resulting in "exclusion of the claims and powers of others in him."[68] Enslaved Africans and people of African descent were thus generally excluded from making any honor claims, let alone having these recognized within the wider (white) slaveholding society.[69] (However, within American slave communities, there were hierarchies that were at least partially based on honor.[70])

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[62] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 114.
[63] Kwame Appiah cites the duel, foot binding, and abolition as examples of how what was deemed honorable changed over time. See Appiah, *The Honor Code*.
[64] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 289.
[65] See Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 33–40.
[66] Craig Bruce Smith, *American Honor: The Creation of the Nation's Ideals during the Revolutionary Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 116–117.
[67] Wyatt-Brown, *A Warring Nation*, 4.
[68] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 35.
[69] Native Americans were likewise excluded from the American honor culture. See Wyatt-Brown, *A Warring Nation*, 44.
[70] Ibid., 30–31.

Incidentally, US relations with the Barbary States had their origins in the enslavement of white Americans. The first captives in Algiers were confronted with the fact that they were being forced into the most dishonorable position known to them. There were (albeit rare) occasions on which comparisons between American chattel slavery and North African slavery were made.[71] Some of these instances will later be discussed in greater detail. For the most part, though, American sailors did not have to fear the prospect of being equated to African slaves. Divisions among color lines were already firmly established, and "American notions of racial inferiority were already so deeply ingrained" that the idea of enslaved white American sailors being the equivalent of African slaves was not considered seriously at the time.[72]

When it comes to the diplomats that were stationed at the Barbary Coast, there were, of course, encounters with individuals who were perceived as racialized Others. This perception intersected with a variety of further assumptions about the region. Religion and cultural differences were also factors that informed the perception of the places where these diplomats were stationed. These issues may thus be more adequately addressed by utilizing Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* which he defines as "dealing with [the Orient] by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it."[73] This approach not only encompasses aspects of race but combines it with other relevant aspects, so that honor claims may be contextualized against the backdrop of what can more precisely be described as the "Orientalized" Other.[74]

As has been stated previously, the conceptualization of honor relevant for this dissertation was coded both white and male. Distinctions between male and female honor have been found "in almost every society."[75] Indeed, female honor has been observed – across various cultures – to be characterized first and foremost by sexual chastity and passivity.[76] This

[71] For a more detailed discussion on the paradoxes of Americans condemning North African slavery, see Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 71–89 and Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776–1815* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 103–106.

[72] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 89. As will be shown, being enslaved in North Africa was nevertheless perceived as a humiliating experience, and carried with it the notion of emasculation, a revocation of male honor.

[73] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 2. For more recent advancements of Said's methodological approach, see Timothy Marr, *The Origins of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Fuad Sha'ban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: The Roots of Orientalism in America* (Durham, North Carolina: Acorn Press, 1991), and Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[74] Because the Barbary States were multi-cultural societies that were inhabited by a variety of ethnic groups (Jews, Turks, Berber People, Arabs, among others,) an Orientalist outlook also effectively served to simplify these complexities.

[75] Pieter Spierenburg, "Masculinity, Violence, and Honor: An Introduction" in *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Early Modern Europe and America*, ed. Pieter Spierenburg (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 2.

[76] As Pieter Spierenburg argues: "Women's honor had always been based primarily on issues of morality. Foremost, it depended on a reputation of chastity." Spierenburg, "Masculinity, Violence, and Honor," 5.

held true in colonial South America,[77] modern France,[78] the post-revolutionary United States,[79] as well as even the Barbary States, as far as accounts of American captives can be trusted.[80]

In the context of foreign policy with the Barbary States, enslavement of white Americans carried with it gendered connotations, transferable to discourses of personal honor. Enslaved white American sailors "had been symbolically emasculated by their experience as Algerian captives."[81] This stood in contrast to the honorable conduct of masculine self-determination and freedom of action: "For men, honour was an active value, something to be gained or regained through conduct, while for women it was thoroughly passive, a thing to be guarded and preserved rather than gained."[82] Captives were thus bereft of their male honor, and when making pleas for redemption – usually by writing letters to their families or government – they had to humiliate themselves further by making this emasculation public.

The view of North Africans as the "Oriental Other" also ascribed to them "feminine" attributes: "Lacking Christianity and the Enlightenment, not to mention manly restraint, North Africans were viewed by Westerners as slaves to their passions who gave in to impulses for all sorts of lascivious behavior."[83] This notion of course further exacerbated the perceived humiliation of Americans held captive by these regencies. Broadly speaking, these countries were perceived to be excluded from any claims to national honor due to their alleged feminine passivity (as well as supposed racial and cultural inferiority). The problems arising from this viewpoint, when contrasted to the military strength these supposedly weak countries possessed relative to the United States, will be addressed throughout this dissertation.

Class, too, is worthy of brief consideration. As Bertram Wyatt-Brown contends, "poor men seldom would be considered members of the gentlemanly class."[84] In fact, indentured servants could also be excluded from the ranks of honor altogether.[85] But the American

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[77] Concerning female honor in colonial South America, Ann Twinam remarks that "Religious devotion was a prized female attribute and virginity a material asset." See, Ann Twinam, *Public Lives, Private Secrets: Gender, Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy in Colonial Spanish America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 60.
[78] See, Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii.
[79] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*.
[80] The captive John Foss reported that women were considered as having dishonored themselves if they engaged in relations with European Christians. The consequences were described thusly: "For being found with a Mahometan woman he is beheaded, and the woman, is put into a sack and carried about a mile at sea, and thrown overboard with a sufficient quantity of rocks (or a bomb) to sink her." See John Foss, "A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss; several years a prisoner in Algiers: Together with some account of the treatment of Christian slaves when sick:—and observations on the manners and customs of the Algerines" in *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, ed. Paul Baepler (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 83.
[81] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 140.
[82] Thomas, *If I Lose Mine Honour*, 77.
[83] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 139.
[84] Wyatt-Brown, *A Warring Nation*, 44.
[85] Ibid.

Revolution did bring about societal change that should not be underestimated. With the abolishment of aristocracy (at least in legal terms) and by "adopting the title of citizens for members of their new republics, the revolutionaries thereby threatened the distinctive status of 'gentleman' and put more egalitarian pressure on their society than they meant to."[86] Some argued that deeds rather than birth should become the new litmus test for what constituted the honor class.[87]

In this sense, the American Revolution might have undermined the importance of personal honor in US society. In her seminal study *Honor in America? Tocqueville on American Enlightenment*, the historian Laurie M. Johnson has argued that aristocracy as well as social inequality are central components of any honor culture. Republicanism would then pose a challenge to this system of hierarchy:

> Aristocracy depends upon special privileges and honor codes which continually validate the worth of its members. The honor code of an aristocracy is a tool it uses to maintain its political power and social status, a point which is frequently brought up by its democratic critics.[88]

However, Laurie goes on to argue (of course, with a focus on the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville) that honor remained a highly relevant category throughout the antebellum period. She resolves the apparent conundrum by distinguishing between "aristocratic honor" and "democratic honor" – which vary in intensity – in her conceptualization.[89]

Of course, a de facto aristocracy (to which most of the Founding Fathers belonged) existed prior to, during, and after the Revolution. Despite the implementation of a republican government, this class of elite politicians continued to distinguish themselves, at least in part, through their honor codes. But, following the implementation of republican principles, suddenly masses of people also believed in the possibility of having their societal status elevated.[90] Time would tell if these prospects would materialize, but during this period, many genuinely believed in the promise of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

The American example illustrates another final point. Honor within a hierarchical society is not necessarily a zero-sum game for the individual. There may be a social class in which all members are regarded as equally entitled to honor claims. The individual does not necessarily have to take away someone's honor in order to gain it for him or herself. (Although

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[86] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 233.
[87] As will be shown, this post-revolutionary enthusiasm is reflected in the writings of James Cathcart.
[88] Laurie M. Johnson, *Honor in America? Tocqueville on American Enlightenment* (New York & London: Lexington Books, 2017), 26.
[89] Ibid., 31. Democratic honor constitutes a component of capitalistic honor, according to Johnson's interpretation of Tocqueville's writing, which emphases hard work as honorable.
[90] Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 233–236.

for honor as a system of hierarchy to make sense, there always needs to be a less honorable class, of course. In the American case, this was predominantly racially codified.) This is different from "*competitive honor*, which you get by excelling at something, by being better at meeting some standard than others."[91]

In conclusion, personal honor may be summarized as a form of self-ascribed positive respect and reputation, recognized by a public (or publics). Honor cultures rank their members on the basis of these claims as well as their recognition, while excluding certain groups altogether; in the American case, this was done on the basis of race and gender, and to a lesser extent, class. Honor claims have a performative dimension; they are not always just spoken or written words. Honor conflicts take place almost always between social equals. Loss of honor results in public shame and humiliation, and the fear of this happening is an important motivation for action. Lastly, because this is ultimately a socially constructed way of classifying people, the rules are subject to change and systems of honor vary over time.

**Extrapolating Honor to the Nation**

At the micro level, honor is thought of in personal terms and is by and large self-serving, i.e. action is taken to elevate one's personal honor (or prevent humiliation). This may of course extend to the family, city, and municipality of the individual, but it is widely agreed – particularly during the early modern period – that the nation was generally the furthest to which one could expand honor claims.[92] "To hold honor was to be held in high esteem by others: an individual, a tribe, *a nation*"[93] – but usually, it did not go any further than that.

Honor has thus far been defined as applicable to the individual. Now, the methodological implications for extrapolating this concept to the national level will be considered. In essence, the individual becomes discursively constructed as the nation. It then follows:

> National honor, when viewed in light of the country as a whole, [is] virtually synonymous with personal honor, just manifested on a wider scale. Collective and national honor are a reflection of the actions of an individual, the citizenry, or the government on that person's or entity's reputation. For one to advance the principle of national honor over personal honor means that the individual is more concerned with the welfare of the nation than his or her own standing. This does not mean that personal honor and national honor did not exist at the same time,

[91] Appiah, *The Honor Code*, 176.
[92] Later during the 19th century, the concepts of "race" and "civilization" might be included here, but less so during the time period under investigation in this study.
[93] Emphasis added. Wyatt-Brown, *A Warring Nation*, 5.

> but there was an expectation that the personal had to be secondary to the collective good.[94]

These key aspects differentiate national honor from personal honor and are worthy of further consideration.

Firstly, when it comes to national honor, agency may alternate between individuals and the collective. The electorate may advance national honor by voting for a certain person or persons, protesting injustices, petition for political changes, or contributing to some larger (national) cause in other ways. The government may enact laws, pass resolutions of national consequence, or enter into treaties. Lastly, armies (or in the American case, militias as well) may bring honor to the nation on the battlefield or disgrace it in cases of defeat.[95] In discourses about national honor, collective bodies are given a greater potential for agency.

And yet, it is important to recognize that these groups are ultimately comprised of individuals who might be singled out as representatives of the whole. In the military realm, for example, this produces "war heroes" that are often granted special rewards and recognition for their advancement of a national cause. Conversely, the ignoble conduct of or offenses against an individual may be regarded as bringing dishonor to the country at large. Because the community is *imagined* and therefore an abstraction, these discourses quite often revert to smaller groups or distinguished persons to authorize statements about the larger collective.

Violating the personal honor of individuals who are perceived to be representatives of a state (or a nation) may thus have tremendous consequences. The historian Ute Frevert has argued, taking Europe as an example, that the perceived humiliation of ambassadors, consuls, or emissaries also humiliated the sovereign by extension. Anything done to state representatives symbolically happened to their sovereign as well; this, in turn, occasionally led to military conflicts.[96]

The pursuit of national honor may often take precedence over an individual's well-being which means personal honor claims may align or come into conflict with national honor. In the former case, soldiers might seek honor on the battlefield for themselves – personally – while simultaneously bringing honor to their country. It is therefore necessary to take this into account in the assessment of statements by individuals who are described as having advanced the honor of a country in one way or another when such an alignment was present. In these cases, the

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[94] Smith, *American Honor*, 19.

[95] In this context, the idea of "honorable defeat" was and remains subject to disagreement. For the American Revolution, see, for example, Smith, *American Honor*, 106–109.

[96] Ute Frevert, *Die Politik der Demütigung: Schauplätze von Macht und Ohnmacht* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2017), 144, 153.

supposed precedence of national honor over the individual may be deceptive or at least ambiguous.

The opposite case may also be revealing; that is to say, the analysis of instances where national honor stands in conflict with personal honor (or even personal well-being). These moments of choice become crucial, because "when historical figures debated a course of action with any degree of seriousness, they were setting priorities, sifting through the demands and constrains of a particular situation, considering their options, and arriving at a decision they considered logical."[97] In these instances, the resulting actions are indicative of larger cultural assumptions and may give insights into the "logics" and prioritization of national and personal honor.

A further crucial distinction between personal and national honor is that the latter takes place within a more *competitive* honor system. That is to say, in almost all instances the elevation of national honor comes at the expense of that of another country. "A . . . difficulty with honor as a moral imperative is that it resides with a group, and groups differ. Thus, it is perennially associated with warfare, a condition under which honor can motivate opposing groups."[98] In other words, because national honor is intrinsically connected to nationalism (which usually asserts that the nation is superior to all others), there is a constant incentive to "maximize" national honor at the expense of the Other, often but not exclusively by military means.

The comparative (and competitive) nature surrounding discourses of national honor also brings with it a complication of the publics or audiences involved. In the context of national honor, the question of "who are the audiences?" becomes even more complex. A nation is both subject to scrutiny by its own population as well as those of other countries. The negotiation of honor thus becomes multi-layered, and on the "societal level, honor may define a country's stake in the international system and its standards for appropriate behavior. Honor defines what is a 'good' and 'virtuous' course of action in the international society vis-à-vis the relevant other."[99]

Discussions about the United States' place in the world became increasingly widespread, as the founding of the United States coincided with the transformation of what Jürgen Habermas referred to as the "public sphere," that "tension-charged field between state

[97] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 291.
[98] Welsh, *What is Honor?*, xvi–xvii.
[99] Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4.

and society."[100] In conjunction with the public face-to-face discussions in "coffee houses" and "salons," the "table societies," newspapers also assumed a critical role during this time.[101] The press had already played a key part in the American Revolution, and their significance only accelerated thereafter.[102] "By the end of the 1790s, "Federalists and Republicans were in complete agreement: a decisive factor in the outcome of their struggle was the press."[103] Domestic politics may have been prioritized during this time, but foreign policy became increasingly relevant as well.[104]

But the domestic population is not the only audience in the field of foreign policy. The "conduct" of the country is also compared to other countries, and their publics constitute imagined audiences of their own. When American citizens were captured by North African corsairs or when the US Navy seemed incompetent in the struggle against Tripoli, these events were not only assessed and discussed with the American public in mind. Diplomats, sailors, naval officers, and statesmen placed these incidents within the larger context of their struggle to establish a new nation on the world stage (with a particular focus on Europe, however). The Mediterranean was a "contact zone" a place where "cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other," which invariably led to constant comparisons between the different countries situated there.[105] (Furthermore, it is also quite telling to which countries comparisons were *not* made; in this case, the Barbary States who were excluded from the international honor group that included North America and Europe.)

Just like the concept of honor itself, these "publics" were mostly the subject of the authors' imaginations. This held particularly true in the case of those diplomats who were stationed at the Barbary Coast. Generally, news from there took several weeks and sometimes months to reach the United States, and while European newspapers circulated throughout the region, it was nevertheless difficult for these individuals to keep abreast of current events in North America or elsewhere. These diplomats were far removed geographically and tasked with the preservation of peace in a foreign country. Thus, imagining an American public overly

[100] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1989), 141.
[101] Ibid., 30.
[102] Jeffrey L. Pasley, *Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 33.
[103] Ibid., 105.
[104] Examples other than the Barbary States include the Jay Treaty, see Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty, Debate, Public Opinion and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006). For the XYZ Affair, see Matthew Rainbow Hale, "'Many Who Wandered in Darkness': The Contest over American National Identity, 1795–1798," *Early American Studies* (2003).
[105] Mary Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 34.

engaged with foreign relations may have led these actors to overestimate the relevance of their mission in some cases.

The late 18th century and early 1800s constitute an important period for the articulation of national honor. Coinciding with the rise of nationalist movements generally,[106] this period has been described by scholars such as Geoffrey Best as the beginning of the end for personal honor cultures, and the advent of its nationalization:

> Nationalism and democracy marched together through the nineteenth century to harden this creed and to broaden its base so that what had previously been a precise code for noblemen became a popular code for patriots: 'the nationalization of honor' having among its products the concept of 'national honor,' the importance of protecting or avenging it, the extension to the nation as a whole of the old personal preference to death to dishonor, and so on.[107]

Without an emphasis on foreign policy, however, statements such as this run the risk of becoming reductive. Personal honor did simply not morph into national honor in some straightforward fashion. (If this process can be observed at all.) Honor cultures varied across time and regions, with the Antebellum South, again, being a prime example of where a personal honor culture could be observed that was quite distinct from the northern regions of the United States.[108]

As is the case with discussions about American nationalism in general, the American Civil War poses a fundamental challenge to claims that some form of progression (nationalism "completed") can be observed during the 19th century. Some have countered that the Union ultimately prevailed, and that this should be regarded as an affirmation of the process of nationalization.[109] But ultimately, any narrative that observes the origins and evolution of either "nationalism," the formation of a rigid "national identity," or the "nationalization of honor" in the course of the century after the founding of the United States will be confronted with the problem of secession. Thus, throughout the 19th century, such forms of identification stood in constant tension with other forms of self-description such as race, religion, regional background, etc.

However, these subordinate aspects (relative to the nation) are somewhat less significant in the realm of foreign policy. In the American case, state-by-state solutions to international

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[106] See Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition,* Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, and Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[107] Geoffrey Best, *Honor Among Men and Nations: The Transformation of an Idea* (Toronto & London: University of Toronto Press, 1982), xii.

[108] See Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, *The Shaping of Southern Culture*, *A Warring Nation*.

[109] Jasper Trautsch, "Inventing America: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Formation of National Identity, 1789–1815," (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2013), 2.

issues were never seriously considered, and the Articles of Confederation's inability to administer foreign policy effectively was part of the reason that power was later consolidated with the ratification of the Constitution.[110] In times of conflict, especially war, mentalities of "us vs. them" intensify, particularly when the antagonist is perceived to be racially and culturally inferior. As will be shown, this was most certainly the case during conflicts with the Barbary States, as evidenced by the frequent references to national honor by those actors involved.

Given this study's focus on foreign policy, it may seem tempting to therefore focus on the discourse of national honor alone. Some scholars have indeed asserted that the word honor "has fallen out of use in private life . . . in the wake of the French and American revolutions."[111] This might result in considering honor mostly in a military, or perhaps aristocratic context.[112] However, personal honor did not suddenly became irrelevant or was relegated to "the barracks or courts."[113] In the case of diplomats stationed at the Barbary Coast, these were by and large neither high-ranking military officials, nor part of the political elite. Both James Cathcart (consul to Tripoli) and Richard O'Brien (consul to Algiers) were sailors whose qualification was their previous captivity in Algiers and their resulting knowledge of the region. Despite their comparatively low social status, a culture of personal honor still existed among these people alongside the emerging discourse which described the nation as a "single honor group," and quite often, these two intersected.[114] Cathcart and O'Brien were officially charged with representing their country while at the same time enduring what they perceived to be harsh insults to their personal honor, both by the representatives of the Barbary States as well as their European and even American colleagues. Attacks on their personal honor were regularly equated with attacks on the nation at large and vice versa. Additionally, personal honor often had to be sacrificed to uphold the nation's standing in the international community.

It is therefore important to situate the most influential actors involved in diplomacy with the Barbary States within a broader cultural context. For one, it was their task to establish a diplomatic network across the entire Mediterranean with back channels to northern Europe and North America. "It was on this maritime frontier that the young nation struggled to define itself economically, socially, and internationally."[115] Challenges abounded, as matters of sovereignty

[110] Lawrence A. Peskin, "The Lessons of Independence: How the Algerian Crisis Shaped Early American Identity," *Diplomatic History* 28 (2004): 308.
[111] Welsh, *What is Honor*, 192.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture*, 35.
[114] James Bowman, *Honor: A History* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), 5.
[115] Matthew Taylor Raffety, *The Republic Afloat: Law, Honor, and Citizenship in Maritime America* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 13.

and citizenship were still highly contested issues between the United States, Europe (particularly France and the United Kingdom), and the Barbary States.[116] In their capacity as diplomats, it was their task to resolve these issues while protecting the interest (and honor) of the United States.

The keen sense of personal honor displayed by these individuals complicated these endeavors. Disputes arose within the diplomatic corps sent to North Africa. Jealousy as well as differences in opinion and rank were all factors that influenced the coordination of diplomatic and military efforts at the time. But, as will be shown, "the language of honor set the terms of debate; the rituals of honor channeled dangerous passion [and] the logic of honor shaped political strategy."[117] This was true for domestic national politics just as it was for foreign policy. Such language then becomes the "key that unlocks countless mysteries of the period, rationalizing the seeming irrational, justifying the seeming petty and perverse, and recasting our understanding of America's founding."[118]

It may be asserted that discourses surrounding national honor could be characterized as mere flowery language. And it is readily granted that in some instances this may have been the case. The term honor can be invoked in a variety of contexts and occupy multiple meanings. When, however, certain terms are mentioned again and again, it becomes increasingly difficult to dismiss these remarks as mere rhetoric. The idea of national honor was not only invoked by the political elite in the United States but also by diplomats with modest backgrounds, military officers, and common sailors. The correspondence of these various groups is the subject of this study, and their analysis comes with certain challenges:

> It would be naive to suppose that, in reading a letter, we are always getting a straightforward peek at someone's true and inner self, their actual thoughts or emotions. Yet the examination of such materials does provide a great deal of insight into how men and women in the early modern period constructed themselves and understood their social roles. Unsurprisingly, in their letters individuals typically represented themselves as acting in accordance with the values and norms of the day.[119]

When accumulated, these letters, reports, instructions, logbooks, diaries, etc. may reveal patterns which, in turn, "reveal larger cultural truths."[120] It is within this context that the discourse on national and personal honor are considered and analyzed.

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[116] Citizens were subject to seizure by the British in the form of impressment and of course by the Barbary States in the form of capture and enslavement.
[117] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 286.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Thomas, *If I lose mine Honour*, 20–21.
[120] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 290.

# Part I: Captivity

## A Brief History of the Barbary States before the American Revolution

To provide some elemental historical context, the following section will first very briefly outline Barbary corsairing activities since the close of the fifteenth century. Following this, the importance of overseas trade for Americans during the Revolutionary period will be considered. Next, there will be a discussion of the three possible responses to Americans being held captive by Algerians after 1785. The first option, the suspension of all Mediterranean trade, will briefly be presented as ultimately unfeasible. Arguments for the second option, war with the Barbary States, will be analyzed with a focus on conceptions of US national honor. For this purpose, Thomas Jefferson will be given special consideration, because he was one of the most ardent proponents of naval warfare. Lastly, there will be a discussion on the path the United States was finally compelled to take – diplomacy. This section will focus on Joel Barlow, as he was the only high-profile diplomat to visit Algiers while Americans were held there.

The Barbary States comprised the regencies of Morocco, Tunis, Algiers, and Tripoli.[1] With the exception of Morocco, these states were all nominally part of the Ottoman Empire, although all acted as de facto independent entities and over the years specialized in the capture and enslavement of European Christians.[2] According to an estimate by the historian Robert C. Davis, up to 1.25 million[3] Europeans were enslaved by these regencies between 1530 and 1780. While this in no way equals the scope of the transatlantic slave trade, its considerable extent largely remained unacknowledged until Davis' comprehensive study of the subject.[4]

The etymological origins of the term "Barbary*"* remain contested. Many have linked the term to the "Berber tribesmen" of that region.[5] Additionally, the term "Bar" may refer to the son of an Egyptian king, and likewise the word "bar" can be interpreted as "desert."[6] Moreover, there is the very obvious connection to the Greek word "barbaros," and its Roman counterpart "barbarus," referring to all people not part of the respective empire(s), including (at

[1] In this study, the commonly cited titles for each regency's ruler will used. That is "emperor" for Morocco, "dey" for Algiers, "bey" for Tunis, and "bashaw" for Tripoli. The ruler of Tripoli is also sometimes referred to as "bey" or "bay" in primary sources.
[2] Luella J. Hall, *The United States and Morocco, 1776–1956* (New York: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1971), 41.
[3] This number only pertains to Christians, however. European Christians likewise captured and enslaved Muslims in the Mediterranean. In total, an estimated three million people – both Muslims and Christians – were captured between 1450 and 1850. See Daniel Hershenzon, *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain and the Mediterranean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 2.
[4] Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 23.
[5] Godfrey Fisher, *Barbary Legend: War, Trade and Piracy in North Africa, 1415–1830* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1957), 19.
[6] Ann Thomson, *Barbary and Enlightenment: European Attitudes toward the Maghreb in the 18th Century* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1987), 13.

times) North Africans.[7] Eventually, these seem to have evolved into the English "barbarian," (as well as its French equivalent "barbare") frequently used by anglophone and French statesmen, diplomats, and travelers to describe the inhabitants of the Levant. The continuous use of the term "Barbary" by virtually all scholars concerned with the region is thus extremely unfortunate but will nevertheless be reproduced here to avoid confusion.

The origins of Barbary corsairing activities can be found in the Reconquista of Spain which resulted in the expulsion of Muslims from Spain and was completed by 1492. Hundreds of thousands were then forced to relocate to the North African coast. This event coincided with the rise of the Ottoman Empire in the East, and thus the 16th century was characterized by attempted imperial expansion from both the West and the East, resulting in Morocco's political independence and the remainder of the Barbary States to be at least formally under Ottoman rule.[8] These tumultuous times, marked by conflict and strife, therefore fueled the mutual antagonism between the European and North African powers for centuries to come.

Most vulnerable to the expeditions of Barbary were those states that were both weak militarily and exposed vast stretches of land to the Mediterranean; the Italian states and Spain, for example, were particularly likely to be subjected to raids by North African corsairs.[9] However, the British Empire, too, was not always exempt from the theft of its subjects. Between 1600 and 1640, as many as 12,000 Britons were captured in raids on Great Britain itself or during attacks at sea.[10] Ireland's coast was likewise subject to raids, and even Iceland, on at least one occasion, was attacked by the Barbary powers.[11]

During the zenith of Barbary naval operations, the most common fate of a captive would have been that of a galley slave whose task was to labor on raiding vessels. These oarsmen suffered from both excruciating physical labor as well as the knowledge that they were being utilized for the purpose of restocking the supply of slaves in the respective regency. This practice ended toward the end of the 1600s, when the need for galleys gradually declined in order to compete with the faster European sailing vessels.[12] The shift from oar-driven galleys to sailing ships, at least in part, contributed to the Barbary States' eventual downfall, which also occurred against the backdrop of the imperial expansion of European powers, such as

[7] Ibid., 14.
[8] Lotfi Ben Rejeb: "'To the Shores of Tripoli': The Impact of Barbary on Early American Nationalism," PhD diss., (Indiana University, 1981), 5–7.
[9] For a lengthy discussion on Italy, see Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*.
[10] This should, however, be regarded as the exception, not the rule. See, Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London: Pimlico, 2003), 43–44.
[11] Daniel Panzac, *Barbary Corsairs: The End of a Legend, 1800–1820* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2005), 26.
[12] Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, 75–79.

Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and, more importantly, France's conquest and colonization of Algiers in 1830.[13]

Captive Europeans could be ransomed, and this, in combination with expensive peace treaties, was the main source of income for these regencies.[14] Such treaties usually stipulated that an annual tribute had to be paid to the regencies to retain peaceful relations. In this respect, there is another clear distinction between the transatlantic system of chattel slavery and the enslavement of European Christians. Powerful nations such as Great Britain and France could usually afford not to go to war and instead pay the annual expense to appease the North Africans. Given that these countries also had powerful navies at their disposal (which could challenge the Barbary States militarily), these were usually comparatively inexpensive treaties. It was generally smaller, less powerful nations which suffered most, because these did not have the means to consistently pay annual tribute, the ransom for slaves, or to respond militarily.[15]

Because the "pirates" that would go out to prey on European ships and coasts were actually by and large privateers, the regencies' governments remained in charge of most operations, making it a "patriotic-religious obligation" to prey on European ships.[16] Unlike the term "piracy" – suggesting sea-robbers without affiliation to any state – the more apt terminology to describe the activities of Barbary is thus "privateering" or "corsairing." The capture of European Christians was therefore state-sanctioned, and it was up to the leaders of these individual states to decide who could negotiate peace treaties.

Between 1530 and the late 18th century, the enslavement of Europeans in the Mediterranean had become an established tradition with little resistance from the European side. At times, certain European states sought to manipulate the Barbary States into attacking their respective commercial rivals.[17] For the Barbary States, there was a constant incentive to find a balance between extorting annual tribute and declaring war on other countries to ensure a continuous influx of both money and European slaves.[18] Hence, "the establishment of peace with one country was almost equivalent to a declaration of war upon another."[19]

Even before Americans separated from the United Kingdom, tales of Barbary slavery had swept to the American shores. The famous Puritan theologian Cotton Mather – although

[13] Fisher, *Barbary Legend*, 1.
[14] Ray W. Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776–1816* (Jefferson, North Carolina & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 8.
[15] Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America and the Middle East to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 20.
[16] Richard B, Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary: A Diplomatic History* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2004), 5.
[17] Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 14–16.
[18] For the Barbary States, "declaring war" simply meant there was justification to prey on enemy ships.
[19] Ibid., 9.

more famously known for his comments on captivity pertaining to Native Americans – also concerned himself with the plight of sailors that were captured by North Africans. His extraordinary knowledge of the conditions of slaves on the other side of the Atlantic is revealed in a sermon entitled *The Glory of Goodness*:

> A Great Number of Our Good Subjects peaceably following their Employments at Sea, have been taken by the Turkish Pirates of *Algiers*, *Salley*, *Barbary*, and other places on the Coast of *Africa*, and now remain Slaves, in Cruel and Inhumane Bondage, without *Dayes of Rest*, either on the *Turkish Sabath* or Ours, except Four Dayes in a Year, being kept to Extream *Labour*; from which, some endeavouring a little Rest, several of them were barbarously Murdered. Neither is their *Diet* any more tolerable than their *Labour*; Great Numbers being allow'd no other Food than decay'd *Barley*, which stinketh so, that the Beasts refuse to eat it.[20]

Mather's knowledge of the plight of captives on the North African coast likely came from letters or first-hand accounts.

It is important to note, however, that many of these descriptions, whether in sermons or letters from the captives, were prone to exaggerations to arouse sympathy so that money for ransom could be collected.[21] Generally, this held true for both Europeans and especially Americans, because captivity narratives had already become an established American literary genre, and sailors could reproduce certain tropes to frame their conditions. For example, they often appealed to the language of sensibility to provoke an emotional response from recipients.[22] The historian Lawrence Peskin has argued that "captives wrote strategically with a clear goal: redemption from an increasingly desperate plight."[23]

The Barbary States were also mentioned in an early draft of the Declaration of Independence. In a condemnation of the African slave trade, Thomas Jefferson drew a direct parallel to North African corsairing while highlighting the ungodliness of human bondage. He charged that King George III

> has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating it's most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. this piratical warfare, the

[20] Cotton Mather, "The Glory of Goodness" in *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, ed. Paul Baepler (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 61–62.
[21] Thomson, *Barbary and Enlightenment*, 6, 26.
[22] Lawrence A. Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1776–1816* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 26.
[23] Ibid., 25.

> approbrium of *infidel* powers, is the warfare of the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain.[24]

Jefferson's invocation of slavery was likely omitted from the Declaration to appease the southern states, yet the direct comparison of the King of England to those distant "infidel powers" testifies to the notoriety these regencies enjoyed. In this instance, Jefferson equated the British monarch with the Barbary States. This would have served not only as a pointed insult to King George III, it would also have portrayed the newly-founded American states as enlightened entities, thus distinguishing them from the antiquated autocracies of the old world.[25]

As the idea of separation from the Crown began to seriously take hold in the 1770s, it became clear that American prosperity would hinge upon the continuation of overseas trade with European and other countries. This, in turn, would rely on the ability to protect this trade from all potentially hostile powers, including but not limited to the Barbary States. It comes as little surprise, then, that Thomas Paine stressed this point in his pamphlet *Common Sense* (1775). Paine's think piece sold over 150,000 copies within the first months of its publication and half a million over the course of a year, making it one of the most influential intellectual justifications for independence.[26] Its main argument – that it was simply common sense to break ties with Great Britain – is considered a major influence on the drafting of the Declaration of Independence. Large parts are dedicated to arguing that the American colonies could easily establish their own navy for the protection of their trade.

By making the point against dependence on Britain, Paine stressed the expediency of trade: "The articles of commerce, by which she [America] has enriched herself, are the necessaries of life, and will always have a market while eating is the custom of Europe."[27] Paine also dismissed the need for British naval protection which he argued was never due to any honest attachment but rather "for the sake of trade and dominion."[28] Rather, the argument went, trade alone would provide sufficient protection in and of itself: "Our plan is commerce, and that, well attended to, will secure us the peace and friendship of Europe to have America a *free port*. Her trade will always be a protection, and her barrenness of gold and silver secure her

[24] Thomas Jefferson, "Jefferson's 'original Rough draught' of the Declaration of Independence" in Julian P. Boyd ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson,* 44 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–), 1:426. Hereafter referred to as *PTJ*.
[25] Of course, this would have necessitated the abolition of slavery in the United States which did not materialize for some decades.
[26] James Wilson Stephens, *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (Cambridge & London: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 43.
[27] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York: Fall River Press, 1995), 23.
[28] Ibid.

from invaders."[29] At least with regard to Europe the assumption prevailed that trade would be on a relatively safe footing.

Nevertheless, in the last section of *Common Sense*, Paine argued strongly for the establishment of an American navy: "No country on the globe is so happily situated, or so internally capable of raising a fleet as America."[30] Given the previous argument of natural protection through trade, such a naval force would then be needed to protect commerce not from Europe but from other parts of the world. While Paine did not mention the Barbary States explicitly, it was acknowledged that "The East and West Indies, *Mediterranean*, Africa, and other parts of the World . . . make large demands upon [the British] navy."[31] Paine implicitly admitted that any trade with these parts of the world would also entail the need for American naval protection once the ties with Britain were severed.

Needless to say, Paine presented his arguments in an extremely optimistic and enthusiastic manner in order to sway public opinion toward independence. And yet, the choice to emphasize trade and America's capability of raising a naval force appears to have resonated with readers, hinting at a shared belief by Americans that this issue was among the most important of its time.[32] Paine strategically pandered to Americans' self-perception as a sea-faring people by asserting that "ship building is America's greatest pride."[33] Ultimately, these promises, visions, and aspirations stood in stark contrast to the realities of the first two and a half decades of American independence, particularly with regard to the Barbary States.

The Barbary States constituted a source of concern even before the Revolutionary War had concluded. As early as 1778, Americans attempted to receive assurances from France. The following passage shows that the possibly devastating effects of Barbary corsairing on American trade in the Mediterranean were already being considered at a relatively early point in the young country's history. While a request for naval protection was omitted in the final draft, the United States' "Treaty of Amity and Commerce" originally stipulated that:

> The most Christian King will employ his good Offices and Interposition with the King or Emperor of Morocco or Fez, the Regencies of Algier, Tunis and Tripoli, or with any of them, and also with every other Prince, State or Power of the Coast of Barbary in Africa, and the Subjects of the said King Emperor, States and Powers, and each of them; in order to provide as fully and efficaciously as possible for the Benefit, Conveniency and Safety of the said United States, and

[29] Ibid., 26.
[30] Ibid., 46.
[31] Emphasis added. Ibid., 48.
[32] For a detailed discussion on the role of fishermen during the American Revolution, see also Christopher P. Magra, *The Fisherman's Cause: Atlantic Commerce and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[33] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 47.

> each of them, their Subjects, People, and Inhabitants, and their Vessels and Effects, against all Violence, Insult, Attacks, or Depredations on the Part of the said Princes and States of Barbary, or their Subjects.[34]

While the war against Great Britain was far from being decided, the treaty shows a certain degree of foresight in identifying the Barbary States as significant actors in future international relations.

In the end, France did nothing of note to help the colonies in this regard. However, there was a minor success with Morocco in the same year. Emperor Sidi Muhammad issued a declaration in February of 1778, recognizing American independence and welcoming American vessels in Moroccan ports. Muhammad's gratuitous behavior can be explained by an attempt to phase out the country's corsairing activities in favor of commercial relations with the countries of Europe and the Americas. After his declaration, the emperor actively sought out to establish official diplomatic relations, but he received no response during the turmoil of the American Revolution.[35]

In 1781, the Battle of Yorktown concluded the last major conflict during the Revolutionary War. Another two years passed until American independence was formally recognized by the British when the Treaty of Paris was agreed upon on September 3, 1783. During these years, all trade had effectively come to a halt, and now was the time for the United States to focus once more on reestablishing commercial relations. During these efforts, United States' politicians again took notice of the Barbary States.

Foreign policy with these North African states began in late 1784, when Morocco's Emperor Muhammad's patience was at an end. He ordered the capture of an American vessel, the *Betsey*, and held the ship's crew hostage at the port of Tangier.[36] The United States responded by sending an emissary named Thomas Barclay to negotiate for peace. In an extraordinary diplomatic success, Barclay's mission resulted in a peace treaty that did not stipulate annual tribute. Furthermore, the emperor agreed to send out letters to the other Barbary States, recommending peaceful relations with the United States.[37] Diplomatic relations with Morocco proved to be the most favorable and stable of all the Barbary regencies, even after the emperor died in 1790, when the country plunged into civil war.[38]

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[34] "Treaty of Amity and Commerce," February 6, 1778 in Hunter Miller, ed., *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, 8 Vols. (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1931), II:8–9.
[35] Hall, *The United States and Morocco,* 46–47.
[36] It should be noted, however, that Muhammad did not enslave the captured crew or force them to perform hard labor. See, Gary E. Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations, 1784–1796: The Public Response," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (1982): 125.
[37] Hall, *The United States and Morocco,* 50–53.
[38] Ibid., 57.

Following the Treaty of Paris, Congress, under the Articles of Confederation, called on John Adams and Thomas Jefferson to meet Benjamin Franklin in Europe to form a diplomatic delegation. The goal was to "have a commercial agreement based on the best possible terms, but also to gain acknowledgment of the independence of the United States" by the European powers as well as the Barbary States.[39] The fact that some of the most important figures of the Revolution were assigned this task testifies for the importance of this mission. Dealing with the European powers was a monumental task in itself, however, the seizing of the *Betsey* also brought attention to the Barbary States, initiating discussion among the American delegation. But it was not until 1785, when Algerian cruisers captured the trading vessels *Maria* and *Dauphin*, that American statesmen and diplomats were confronted with the extent of Barbary corsairing in the wider context of Mediterranean trade. The capture of American citizens was sure to give rise to demands for tribute and ransom, thus complicating the establishment of peaceful relations with the Barbary States.

As news spread that vessels from Algiers had captured US citizens, Americans (both in the United States and Europe) began to consider possible responses to the North African threat. Three options presented themselves. The United States could suspend its trade in the Mediterranean entirely; the United States could attempt to oppose the Barbary States militarily (though this required a naval buildup); and lastly, the United States could fall in line with most other European countries and pay annual tribute and ransom. All these options were discussed extensively by American top-level diplomats.[40] As will be shown, the idea of pursuing a foreign policy congruent with conceptions of national honor was a prominent theme in these discussions.

**The Unfeasibility of Suspending Mediterranean Trade**

The permanent suspension of trade in the Mediterranean, though briefly a result of the first round of captures (to an extent), was the least likely of the three options. As has been argued, many Americans understood themselves as a sea-faring people, so it would have been perceived as "humiliating for a nation such as the United States with its great naval potential,

[39] The list of nations to treat with included, Great Britain, Hamburg, Saxony, Prussia, Denmark, Russia, Austria, Venice, Rome, Naples, Tuscany, Sardinia, Genoa, Spain, Portugal, Turkey (i.e. the Ottoman Empire), Algiers, Tripoli, Tunis, and Morocco. See, Paul A. Gilje, *Free Trade and Sailors Rights in the War of 1812* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49.

[40] Peskin, *Captives and* Countrymen, 94. See also, Lawrence A. Peskin, "The lessons of Independence: How the Algerian Crisis Shaped Early American Identity," *Diplomatic History* 28 (2004).

to be virtually driven out of the shipping business."[41] While in Algiers, the captive Richard O'Brien observed that "before the [Revolutionary] war the Americans used to employ 200 sail of merchantmen in the streights trade, & used to reap great advantages by it."[42] Indeed, prior to the Revolution, approximately fifteen percent of all exports went to the Mediterranean.[43] It comes as little surprise that many Americans were eager to reinstate this lucrative trade, now that peaceful relations with Great Britain had been established.

Additionally, even if the suspension of trade would have been the official policy of the United States, the enforcement of such a policy would have been virtually impossible. In a later report to the secretary of state, Joel Barlow (while in Algiers) commented on the unruliness of American merchant sailors at the time:

> It is well known that American masters and merchants are more stupedly adventurous in this respect [Mediterranean trade] than those of other nations. I have no doubt that there are at this moment a hundred American vessels in the Mediterranean, of which all the masters and probably all the owners know that we are not at peace with Tunis & Tripoli. And according to all that has been written from this place there was more than an even chance that we were at war with Algiers. It is needless for me to state the consequences of such conduct as they effect the nation.[44]

Thus, even if the legislature enacted laws to suspend the Mediterranean trade, American merchants and sailors would likely ignore such legislation.

Furthermore, Americans would often times simply pretend to be British, should such deceptive behavior prove advantageous. In 1785, the same year the *Dauhpin* and *Maria* were captured, the Massachusetts ship *Rambler* narrowly escaped Barbary corsairs by flying the British flag. Americans (among others) likely carried the flags of other nations on their ships for the express purpose of displaying these when unknown (and thus possibly hostile) vessels approached.[45] Particularly for Americans, it made sense to take the disguise of British sailors,

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[41] Frederick W. Marks III, *Independence on Trial: Foreign Affairs and the Making of the Constitution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1973), 136.
[42] Richard O'Brien to whom not indicated, April 28, 1787, in Dudley W. Knox ed., *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 6 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), I:67. Hereafter referred to as *Naval Documents*.
[43] John J. McCusker, "Worth a War? The Importance of the Trade between British America and The Mediterranean" in *Rough Waters: American Involvement with the Mediterranean in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Silvia Marzagalli, James R. Sofka, and John J. McCusker (St. Johns, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2010), 8. Other scholars even estimate that goods shipped to the Mediterranean might have constituted as much as one fifth of all exports. See Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 8.
[44] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, October 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland. Hereafter referred to as NARA.
[45] Peskin, "The Lessons of Independence," 297.

because they were familiar with their customs and manners, having shared their nationality until recently.[46]

Likewise, the forgery of British sea-passes had become a common practice during the American Revolution and continued even after 1783.[47] (These sea-passes were presented by sailors when boarded and inspected by foreign vessels and ensured free passage.) It is of course impossible to determine how many American ships were able to evade capture and enslavement by employing these strategies of deception. However, these examples demonstrate that the complete suspension of trade in the Mediterranean would have been a hopeless endeavor.

Additionally, it is doubtful whether such a policy could even be agreed to under the Articles of Confederation which were notoriously weak on matters of foreign policy.[48] What is more, it was unclear whether it would have been even legal under the Articles. And even if this undertaking would somehow have been feasible, Barbary corsairs occasionally ventured out to the Atlantic through the Straits of Gibraltar (if the political situation allowed it). This was the case, for instance, in 1793 when even more American ships fell prey to Algerian cruisers.

Lastly, a discontinuation of Mediterranean trade would stand in profound opposition to basic principles of the American Revolution. The Mediterranean in particular, due to its proximity to Europe, made American vulnerabilities particularly visible and was perceived as especially degrading. On this issue, even rivals such as Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson could find common ground: "both agreed on a fundamental point: the United States could not become truly independent as long as its assets were subject to seizure, especially in the Caribbean and Mediterranean."[49] For these reasons, abstaining from trade in the Mediterranean altogether was not seriously considered by most Americans at the time.

**Honor and War: Reactions of the American Political Elite**

Despite the relatively weak and ineffective governing structure that was provided by the Articles of Confederation, going to war with the Barbary States was seriously considered by a

[46] The American captive James Cathcart stated, after he was captured and paraded on the street, many Algerians were "much surprised to see us so fair or, as they expressed themselves, so much like Englishmen." See, James Leander Cathcart, *The Captives: Eleven Years a Prisoner in Algiers* (La Porte, Indiana: Herald Print, 1899), 11. See also, Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, *Citizen Sailors: Becoming American in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 81.

[47] For a more detailed discussion on this practice, see Fatima Maameri, "Ottoman Algeria in Western Diplomatic History with Particular Emphasis on Relations with the United States of America, 1776–1815," (PhD diss., University Mentouri, Constantine, 2008), 171–174.

[48] George William Van Cleve, *We Have Not a Government: The Articles of Confederation and the Road to the Constitution* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London: 2017), 250.

[49] James Sofka, "American Neutral Rights Reappraised: Identity or Interest in the Foreign Policy of the Early Republic?" *Review of International Studies* 26 (2000): 605.

variety of high-ranking statesmen at the time. Being in favor of naval armament was a sentiment that transcended the emerging ideological schisms,[50] and proponents included John Paul Jones, John Jay, and Thomas Jefferson, as well as –with some reservations – John Adams. While their reasoning was doubtless also informed by the idea of "interest," as in protecting American trade, arguments in favor of going to war with Algiers or any number of Barberry States also centered around the idea of establishing and upholding US national honor and contrasting such behavior with the passivity of many of the European powers.

John Paul Jones, naval hero of the American Revolutionary War, was among the first to see positive facets in the Algerian captures of 1785. Jones appeared confident that war with Algiers could be easily won and secure an important second victory after American independence. Moreover, he regarded the events as a prime opportunity to both unite the American people and to garner respect on the world stage:

> This event [the captures] may, I believe, surprise some of our fellow-Citizens; but, for my part, I am rather surprised that it did not take place sooner. It will produce a good effect, if it Unites the People of America in measures consistent with their national Honor and Interest, and rouses them from illjudged security which the intoxication of success has produced since the Revolution. The Regency of [Algiers] is a powerful State . . . My best wishes will always attend America, and my Pride will be always gratifyed when such measures are adopted as will make her respected as a great Nation that deserves to be Free.[51]

The lack of surprise he expressed upon hearing about the captures maybe regarded as a testimony to his familiarity with the Barbary States and the European tradition of paying tribute and ransom over the past centuries. It may come as little surprise that a former naval commander would favor war, but the line of argument is nevertheless noteworthy

The way this victory would be achieved is, according to Jones, by way of uniting the American people once more against a common enemy in accordance with their "national honor and interest." This aspect is then to be replicated internationally, when the United States would become "respected" by forcing Algiers into submission. As such, the idea of national honor is stated outright once, and implied again in Jones' reasoning for a military conflict with Algiers, presumably won easily and quickly.

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[50] These became first visible in the debate surrounding the ratification of the Constitution, when Federalists debated Antifederalists. See Joseph J. Ellis, *The Quartet: Orchestrating the Second American Revolution, 1783–1789* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York), 2015), 157–191.

[51] John Paul Jones to John Jay, August 6, 1785, in Mary-Jane M. Dowd ed., *The Emerging Nation: A Documentary History of the Foreign Relations of the United States under the Articles of Confederation, 1780–1789*, 3 vols. (Washington D.C.: National Historical Publications and Record Commission, 1996), II:734. Hereafter referred to as *Emerging Nation*.

This was a sentiment also shared by the recipient of Jones' letter, John Jay. Upon receiving news that Algiers had captured Americans, he stated that "this War does not strike me as a great Evil – The more we are treated ill abroad, the more we shall unite and consolidate at Home – Besides, as it may become a Nursery for Seamen, and lay the Foundation of a respectable Navy, it may eventually prove more beneficial than otherwise."[52] Jay also emphasized how a naval war had the potential of uniting the American people behind a common cause and defend their interest abroad. Jay's focus on the domestic effects of a war with Algiers also became apparent in a letter to John Adams in which he claimed that a navy could "draw us more closely into a foederal system."[53] The pursuit of explicit ideological and political goals was thus also a motivation for engaging militarily with Algiers.

In addition to domestic advantages, Jay also invoked the international ramifications of going to war. The desire for a respectable navy in order to rectify abuses by foreign powers was similar to the sentiment also expressed by Jones, i.e. respect in Europe. Both wished to utilize the navy for advancing the reputation of the United States internationally by fighting Algiers. Furthermore, both agreed that Algiers would be easily subdued if the United States would build a navy. The prospect of failure was not considered. Notably, neither Jones nor Jay framed the reasoning behind going to war as driven by economic interest. Their stated motivations were ideological.

The fact that both John Paul Jones and John Jay expressed the sentiment that Algiers could be crushed without much resistance demonstrated a sense of optimism despite the limited resources available to the United States at the time. But this view was not without its critics. In response to Jay's bellicosity, French diplomat Louis Guillaume Otto expressed rather virulent criticism as well as astonishment to his colleague, Comte de Vergennes. Otto's comments exemplify a clear distinction between European and American perspectives on the issue of Barbary corsairing. Namely, that the Barbary States constituted formidable adversaries that would not easily be defeated. Tribute and ransom were described as preferable to war in almost all cases. Otto outlined his arguments as follows:

> This Minister [Jay] seriously proposed to make war on them; he asserts that the United States are in a proper condition to overawe the Barbary Corsairs, without stooping to pay them tribute . . . The majority of Congress knows very well, My Lord, that war would serve as a bond to the confederation, but cannot conceal from itself the little means available to make war with advantage. It is hoped that

[52] John Jay to the President of Congress, October 13, 1785, *Emerging Nation*, II:862.
[53] John Jay to John Adams, October 14, 1785, *Emerging Nation*, II:863.

> the Agents whom Mr. Jefferson has sent to Algeria to negotiate a treaty of amity will succeed in obtaining reasonable terms.[54]

The passage shows that the French diplomats were privy to political realities of which Americans such a Jay and Jones were apparently ignorant. As the Algerian crisis unfolded, this became increasingly clear, and any initial sense of optimism, as expressed by the American statemen, would become increasingly difficult to justify.

Yet, for the time being, advocates of a naval buildup remained confident about their prospects. Thomas Jefferson was a particularly noteworthy proponent of warfare with the Barbary States. During his stay in Europe, he exchanged numerous letters with his diplomatic colleagues. In these letters, Jefferson explained some of his arguments. Jefferson proved to be far more belligerent than his peers on this issue, and the first Barbary War (1801–1805) was fought during his presidency (and in part due to his initiative). His arguments and motivations thus require an especially thorough investigation. As will be shown, some of Jefferson's reasoning was based on the pursuit of what was commonly described as "interest" which is to say, the protection of American trade.[55] However, "interest" was frequently linked to the idea of "honor" which was another key argument for the establishment of a navy.

In terms of "interest," one of the reasons for favoring war over diplomacy in the Mediterranean was Jefferson's vision for the United States more broadly. Jefferson envisioned America to become a predominantly agrarian society. Concerning farmers, he wrote the following: "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independant, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to it's liberty and interests by the most lasting bands."[56] An agrarian society, for Jefferson, would not only produce and maintain a moral people but in a larger sense contribute to the safety and unity of the republic in general.[57]

However, a society dedicated to the advancement of agriculture would have to export its surplus of grain eventually. Upon considering this issue, Jefferson outlined a hierarchy of employment. Notoriously skeptical of the utility and morality of manufacturing, he regarded engaging in overseas trade as the second most important profession:

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[54] Louis Guillaume Otto to Comte de Vergennes, New York, December 25, 1785, *Emerging Nation*, II:968.
[55] For a more thorough discussion on this point, see also Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).
[56] Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, August 23, 1785, *PTJ*, 8:426.
[57] In fact, it has been argued that for Jefferson, "departure from that arrangement constitutes a perversion of nature and a plunge into moral degeneracy." See Mark Sturges, "Enclosing the Commons: Thomas Jefferson, Agrarian Independence and Early American Land Policy, 1774–1789," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 119 (2011): 60.

> our citizens will find emploiment in this line [farming] till their numbers, and of course their productions, become too great for the demand both internal and foreign. This is not the case as yet, and probably will not be for a considerable time. As soon as it is, the surplus of hands must be turned to something else. I should then perhaps wish to turn them to the sea in preference to manufactures, because comparing the characters of the two classes I find the former the most valuable citizens.[58]

Especially toward the end of the 18th century, this idea of the "panacea of wheat" would increase in relevance, as various conflicts in Europe disrupted the steady supply of grains there, allowing Americans to profit from the surrounding chaos.[59]

American exports were severely threatened by the actions of the Barbary States. After the Algerian captures, Jefferson was informed of the wider ramifications of these events:

> The Inhabitants of these States [Kentucky and other Western Territories] are greatly alarmed at the hostility of the Algerines, which puts a stop to our eastern Trade to Spain, and all Countries in the Mediterranean. I should be much obliged by being informed what prospect we have of accommodating this matter, for it is of the utmost Consequence to our grain trade, which is now the more interesting as Tobacco so much declines in value.[60]

This quote illustrates the extent to which a single North African regency was capable of seriously disrupting American commerce: "Barbary States were more than just a nuisance for the United States. The threat they posed to American commerce endangered the republic."[61] All these considerations were doubtless taken into account by Jefferson in discussions on how to deal with the Barbary States.

Jefferson favored war over diplomacy even before American ships were captured by Algiers. While in Paris, Jefferson expressed his frustration about not being able to find out how much the other European states paid in annual tribute (to have an idea of what to expect for the United States). He followed up his complaints by outlining his preferred strategy: "Why not go to war with them? . . . We ought to begin a naval power, if we mean to carry on our own commerce. Can we begin on a more honourable occasion or with a weaker foe? I am of opinion Paul Jones . . . would totally destroy their commerce . . . by constant cruising and cutting them to peices by peicemeal."[62] In this instance, Jefferson displayed a notably high level of confidence while baselessly considering the Barbary States to be weak. Like John Paul Jones

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[58] Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, August 23, 1785, *PTJ*, 8:426.
[59] Mark Sturges, "Founding Farmers: Jefferson, Washington, and the Rhetoric of Agricultural Reform," *Early American Literature* 50 (2015): 691.
[60] John Bannister to Thomas Jefferson, December 2, 1785, *PTJ*, 9:75–76.
[61] Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), 51.
[62] Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, November 11, 1784, *PTJ*, 7:511–512.

and John Jay, he did not sincerely contemplate why various European countries were unsuccessful in ending the centuries-old system of Barbary corsairing. The costs and logistics of perpetually displaying a naval squadron in the Mediterranean were likewise not considered. Jefferson's sentiment also marked an unusual departure from Anti-Federalists positions with which he is often associated. "Jefferson, the textbook proponent of states' rights, was more than willing to embrace big government when it advanced the cause of agrarian independence."[63] But whereas in this (rare) instance, the emphasis did rely on "commerce," the quotation also hints at another important idea. Namely, that the timing provided an *honorable* occasion to establish a navy.

While the protection of America's overseas trade was without a doubt taken into consideration, Jefferson's reasoning rested heavily on the concept of honor. The correspondence between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson during their time in Europe provides insights as to how the two approached the issue of Barbary corsairing, after Americans were already being held captive in Algiers. Jefferson and Adams were still on friendly terms at this point,[64] and the letters they exchanged may be understood as two colleagues exchanging in an open and honest dialogue, weighing their options, while Congress provided no instructions on how to handle the unfolding crisis.[65] The arguments were presented in carefully written letters that took into account various perspectives.

John Adams favored a pragmatic approach. Seeing the opportunity to buy peace as a way of securing Mediterranean trade, he insisted on doing so promptly as the most effective means of driving down costs. In his letter to Thomas Jefferson, Adams listed four premises from which he drew this conclusion:

> 1. We may at this Time, have a Peace with them . . . for a Sum of Money. 2. We never Shall have Peace, . . . without a Sum of Money. 3. That neither the Benevolence of France nor the Malevolence of England will be ever able materially to diminish or Increase the Sum. 4. The longer the Negotiation is delayed, the larger will be the Demand. From these Premisses I conclude it to be wisest for Us to negotiate and pay the necessary Sum, without Loss of Time . . . At present we are Sacrificing a Million annually [in lost trade] to Save one Gift of two hundred Thousand Pounds. This is not good Œconomy.[66]

[63] Sturges, "Enclosing the Commons," 45.
[64] Jefferson and Adams famously became rivals after the "Revolution of 1800," Jefferson's electoral victory over Adams for the presidency. Though others have argued that disagreement over US policy with the Barbary States laid the seeds for the infamous feud. See Christopher Hitchens, *Thomas Jefferson: Author of America* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 129.
[65] Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations," 127.
[66] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, July 3, 1786, *PTJ*, 10:86.

Adams' underlying reasoning behind paying tribute and ransom thus stemmed from a fiscally conservative approach to the issue; his main argument was that saving money was more important than defending moral principles.

Despite his partiality to tribute and ransom, Adams still agreed that war against the Barbary States would be morally permissible. Scolding European passivity, he asserted that "the Policy of Christendom has made Cowards of all their Sailors before the Standard of Mahomet," and added that it would be "heroical and glorious" if the United States were to wage war, concluding "I doubt not we could accomplish it, if we should set about it in earnest."[67] Ultimately, however, Adams ended his letter by admitting that the American people could probably not be convinced to undertake such an endeavor. Like most other statesmen at the time, Adams expressed little doubt that a military victory could easily be achieved. In that, he tacitly admitted that his approach could be conceived as likewise cowardly, since his conclusion was ultimately to emulate European nations in submitting to the Barbary States.

Jefferson disagreed with Adams' proposition, although he concurred with Adams on his first three arguments quoted above; namely, peace with Algiers would cost money, and the United States could not expect other European nations to exert any influence on this indisputable fact. On the fourth, that a peace treaty would only become more expensive over time, he commented that "this will depend on the intermediate captures: if they are many and rich the price may be raised; if few and poor it will be lessened."[68] This may seem like a minor point, however, as will be shown, Jefferson's understanding of how the Barbary States calculated the demands for tribute and ransom informed his approach to the Algerian captures in that he followed a policy of neglect and abstained from contacting the American captives in order to drive down the demands of the Dey of Algiers.

Jefferson also acknowledged Adams' claim that if peace with Algiers (and the other Barbary States) was to be bought, this should be done swiftly. However, Jefferson interjected that he would prefer to begin diplomatic relations with the Barbary States by going to war. Like Adams, he listed a number of premises to substantiate his conclusion: "1. Justice is in favor of this opinion. 2. Honor favors it. 3. It will procure us respect in Europe, and respect is a safe-guard to interest. 4. It will arm the federal head with the safest of all the instruments of coercion

[67] Ibid., 10:87.
[68] Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, July 11, 1786, *PTJ*, 10:123.

. . . 5. I think it least expensive.[69] . . . 6. It will be as effectual."[70] While protecting American trade is obviously implied in Jefferson's arguments, it is curious that, unlike Adams, Jefferson did not invoke commerce (or the prospect of losing it) in any of the reasons he provided (other than a passing reference to "Interest").

Like Adams, Jefferson laid out his reasoning in an orderly manner, giving reason after reason in treatise-like fashion. The arguments can be divided into two categories: those stemming from ideological conviction and those originating from a supposedly more analytical cost-benefit perspective of the issue. "Justice," "honor", and "respect in Europe" are all somewhat intangible and should therefore be placed in the former category. The succeeding three arguments are more calculating in nature; a navy, Jefferson reasoned, could not endanger the people's liberty in the same way an army could. The last two reasons – that war would be less expensive while being as effective – once more pointed to the practicality of a navy, because these two arguments rested on the assumption that treaties with the Barbary States were unreliable.[71]

Jefferson's first argument – that "justice is in favor of this opinion" – likely stemmed from a conviction that the Barbary States operated outside any legal basis for warfare. Unlike European powers, who generally agreed on some principles of what constituted lawful – *just* – causes for engaging in hostilities, the supposedly "barbaric" and moreover Islamic autocracies of North Africa were placed outside that realm of distinction.[72] For Jefferson, one of the most ardent proponents of separating church and state in his time, this was made most apparent during an interview he and John Adams had with a Tripolitan ambassador earlier that year. Upon inquiring the justification for their hostilities, the ambassador reportedly replied the following: "that it was founded on the Laws of their Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, . . . that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as Prisoners, and that every Musselman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise."[73] Such logic stood in stark contrast to Jefferson's

[69] This point was followed up by detailed speculations about the cost of a navy contrasted with the price of buying a peace treaty.
[70] Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, July 11, 1786, *PTJ*, 10: 123. On the sixth point, Jefferson argued that war would make a more lasting impression than buying a peace, because he regarded peace treaties as unreliable. He cited other European powers as examples of this.
[71] For further discussion on the reliability of treaties with the Barbary States, see also Kola Folayan, "The Tripolitan War: A Reconsideration of the Causes," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 27 (1972).
[72] Of course, there could still be disagreement about what was supposed to be justified causes for war. But documents like the Declaration of Independence (which is in essence a long list of grievances justifying separation and open warfare) prove that these points were at least presented to the conflicting party and thus placed the antagonist (in this case George III) within the domain of reasonable discourse.
[73] American Commissioners to John Jay, March 28, 1786, *PTJ*, 9:358.

espoused principles and what, for him in any case, the American republic was supposed to represent; that is to say, opposition to autocratic and arbitrary rule and religious fanaticism.[74] From this perspective, Jefferson's insistence on the otherwise rather vague concept of "justice" appears consistent with his secular world view.

Additionally, like many other statesmen of the early republic, Jefferson's perspective on foreign relations was influenced heavily by the Swiss Enlightenment philosopher and lawyer Emer de Vattel. Vattel was certainly not the only author to contemplate the laws of international relations,[75] and the focus on Vattel as the singular authority on foreign policy at the time has since been criticized.[76] Nevertheless, the seminal *The Law of Nations* (*Le Droit des Gens*) constituted an essential foundation for the conduct of foreign policy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (for both European countries and the United States). Jefferson in particular has been described as an "avid reader of Vattel's work."[77]

One of the central concerns of *Law of Nations* is state sovereignty and its infractions. Vattel states that "every nation that governs itself, under what form soever, without any dependence on foreign power, is a *sovereign state*. Its rights are naturally the same as those of any other state."[78] Such reasoning found application in Europe where the principles of sovereignty dictated "parity," i.e. states would negotiate with each other as equals, even if they differed in size and military might.[79] As Jefferson's account of his interview with the Tripolitan ambassador shows, these principles were not applied by the Barbary States. Their demands for tribute and ransom violated the sovereignty of the United States and therefore placed them thoroughly outside the system of the respectable conduct established between "civilized" nations. Contemporary interpretations of international law thus condoned the use of force as "just" in this sense as well.[80]

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[74] For a detailed discussion on Jefferson's secular worldview, see John Ragosta, *Religious Freedom: Jefferson's Legacy, America's Creed* (University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville & London: 2013), 7–40.

[75] Other important figures worth mentioning in this context are Hugo Grotius, Samuel von Pufendorf, and Jean Barbeyrac. For a more detailed discussion on the use of Vattel in American jurisprudence, see Brian Richardson, "The Use of Vattel in the American Law of Nations," *The American Journal of International Law* 106 (2012).

[76] Richardson, "The Use of Vattel in the American Law of Nations," 547.

[77] Walter Rech, "Ambivalences of Recognition: The Position of the Barbary Corsairs in Early Modern International Law and International Politics" in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean, 1550–1810*, ed. Mario Klarer (London & New York, Routledge, 2019), 91.

[78] Emer de Vattel, *Law of Nations: Or Principles of the Law of Nature; Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns* (Northampton, Massachusetts: Thomas M. Pomroy, 1805), 60.

[79] Ute Frevert, *Die Politik der Demütigung: Schauplätze von Macht und Ohnmacht* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2017), 152.

[80] Vattel mentioned the Barbary States in greater detail at a later point: "A war lawful and in form, is carefully to be distinguished from an unlawful war, entered on without any form, or rather from those incursions which are committed either without lawful authority, or apparent cause, as likewise without formalities, and only for havoc and pillage . . . and such in general are the depredations of pirates. To the same class belong almost all the expeditions of the African Corsairs, though authorized by a sovereign, they being founded on no apparent just cause, and whose only motive is the avidity of captures. I say, these two sorts of wars, lawful and unlawful, are to

Jefferson's second argument, the notion that it would indeed be honorable to fight, relates to both the first and third argument. While the pursuit of "justice" demands fighting the unlawful piratical states on basic principle, the second argument adds to this undertaking a noble and furthermore public quality. Vattel's theories of international relations are once more instructive in this case. Wars, fought ethically and according to the principles of sovereignty, are highly appraised in *The Law of Nations*. While also stressing the values of good administration and the "merit of the persons of whom the nation is composed,"[81] the ability to use force is cited as the one of the most important components of national honor: "The glory of a nation depends entirely on its powers and forms a considerable part of it."[82]

Honor, then, emerges as a central logic for conflict resolution in the realm of foreign relations: "Vattel understood honor, virtue, and glory as inherently linked through an ethical waging of warfare."[83] Jefferson's arguments mirror Vattel's theories, as he applied them to the Barbary States.[84] They also coincide with Adams' invocation of "heroism and glory" that would result from military victory. In this context, however, the concept of honor – with regard to its application to international relations – may also be regarded as a *rationale* informed by Enlightenment philosophy, rather than a predominantly emotional, i.e. irrational concept.

Honor has previously been described as a form of public, positive respect. It follows that Jefferson's third reason for going to war with the Barbary States – the procurement of respect in Europe – is then also directly entangled with his wish to advance US national honor by promoting America's reputation in Europe. In numerous letters, Jefferson expressed anxiety about how the United States was perceived abroad, and he reported that vengeful British newspapers were painting an untruthful picture of the new government. He alleged that "no paper comes out without a due charge of paragraphs manufactured by persons employed for that purpose."[85] He furthermore maintained that "our national respect needs strengthening in

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be carefully distinguished; their effects, and the rights arising from them, being very different." See, Vattel, *Law of Nations*, 388.

[81] Vattel, *Law of Nations*, 151.

[82] Ibid., 150–151.

[83] Craig Bruce Smith, *American Honor: The Creation of the Nation's Ideals during the Revolutionary Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 11.

[84] In addition to Emer de Vattel, John Locke is often cited as highly influential on Jefferson's understanding of international law. Some scholars have identified Locke's theories to be the main driver of Jefferson's hawkish approach to foreign policy with the Barbary States. See C.B. Bow, "Waging War for the Righteous: William Eaton on Enlightenment, Empire and Coup d'état in the First Barbary War, 1801–1805," *History* 101 (2016): 695–697. However, Vattel's work may arguably be regarded as more important in this context, because the Barbary States are mentioned specifically in *The Law of Nations*, and it includes a rationale to fight these regencies. Locke's theories, on the other hand, have been described as notably lenient in the context of Muslim nations. See Nabil Matar, "John Locke and the 'Turbanned Nations,'" *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2 (1991).

[85] Thomas Jefferson, "Jefferson's Reply to the Representation of Affairs in America by British Newspapers," before November 20, 1784, *PTJ*, 7:540.

Europe," and fighting the very states Europe was incapable of suppressing for centuries were regarded as a means to that end.[86]

The emphasis on Europe makes visible a certain duality in Jefferson's thinking. On the one hand, the various European states (but particularly Great Britain) were described as antiquated, especially in the comparison between the American republic and the traditional monarchical systems of government. Jefferson made this clear in no uncertain terms when he stated that "with all the defects of our governments, whether general or particular, the comparison of our governments with those of Europe are like a comparison of heaven and hell."[87] On the other hand, Americans at the time relied on Europe as a point of reference to measure their relative success in self-government, and statesmen such as Jefferson expressed a desire to gain the approval of European nations. War against the Barbary States provided a seemingly effortless opportunity to expose European weakness while at the same time cultivating respect from these very same (European) states.

Therefore, Americans viewed the European powers within the realm of national honor despite their supposed shortcomings. Their respect is described as desirable, as exemplified by Jefferson. The same did not apply to the Barbary States. US reputation in the Barbary States was presented as an instrument, it was only ever described as relevant when it could serve the purpose of lowering the price of tribute and ransom or, preferably, to avoid these demands altogether. The public aspect of national honor was therefore limited only to the European powers; they were the audience (next, perhaps, to the American public) to which the show of force against the Barbary States would have been directed.

Jefferson's fourth argument shifts away from his ideological convictions and instead focuses on a more pragmatic approach. Concurring with John Jay, Jefferson saw a navy as a boon to the strength of the national government. At the same time, Jefferson –usually a stern critic of Federalism[88] – regarded a navy as a *safe* way of providing the government with military power. Elsewhere, he argued that "a naval force can never endanger our liberties, nor occasion bloodshed; a land force would do both."[89] His zeal for naval armament continued to be a point of contention, as he differed from his fellow Antifederalists in this regard.

[86] Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, May 10, 1786, *PTJ*, 9:501.
[87] Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Jones, August 14, 1787, *PTJ*, 12:34.
[88] This is perhaps best exemplified when Jefferson, as vice president under the Federalist administration of John Adams, famously signed the Kentucky Resolution in protest of the so-called "Alien and Sedition Acts." The resolution was even viewed as "secessionist" according to one historian. See Stephen F. Knott, *Alexander Hamilton and the Persistence of Myth* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 47.
[89] Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, August 11, 1786, *PTJ*, 10:225.

Next, there was an attempt to counter Adams' concern about finances. Jefferson surmised that a navy would cost about as much as a treaty with Algiers, despite the fact that he suggested for this naval force to be "in constant cruise."[90] Based on the idea that both a fleet and a peace treaty would cost about the same, Jefferson proposed his final argument: that a peace treaty by means of war would be as reliable as buying peace. In fact, Jefferson expressed the belief that it would be more effectual to go to war. This argument rested on two observations. Firstly, Jefferson noted that the unsuccessful attempts by Spain and Portugal to fight the Barbary States were due to "mismanagement."[91] Secondly, Jefferson cited the historic precedent set by France. Only forty years prior, Jefferson asserted, three frigates were sufficient to blockade the port of Algiers and dictate terms of peace.[92] This implied that the United States could achieve the same with an equivalent fleet.

In Jefferson's sixth and final argument, there was an admission that naval war with Algiers would still be "exposed to incertainties."[93] This was ostensibly countered, however, by the fact that treaties with the Barbary States were regarded as notoriously unreliable. In this context, Jefferson also attempted to strengthen his argument by invoking the dey's age. Comparing the uncertainties of war, "against this the greater incertainty of the duration of a peace bought with money, from such a people, from a Dey 80 years old,"[94] Jefferson concluded that war would be preferable to diplomacy. While it may at first seem trivial, the age of the Dey of Algiers suggested that a change in leadership would soon occur. After a transition of power in one of the Barbary States, it was customary to provide the new ruler provide with consular presents, and it was possible that existing treaties had to be renegotiated.[95] Thus, instead of risking to enter a treaty that would soon prove void, Jefferson preferred to create a more consequential impression by going to war with Algiers.

In his reply to Jefferson, Adams expressed skepticism. He agreed that if the American legislature were to sanction the deployment of a naval force, he "Should be very willing to resolve upon eternal War with them," and – echoing the sentiments of John Jay and John Paul Jones – speculated that a conflict with Algiers "would raise the Spirits and Courage of our

[90] Ibid., 10:123. (Compared to the cost of frigates the United States would eventually build a decade later, his estimates proved to be off by some orders of magnitude.)
[91] Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, July 11, 1786, *PTJ*, 10:124
[92] Ibid.
[93] Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, July 11, 1786, *PTJ*, 10:124
[94] Ibid.
[95] Richard O'Brien once commented the following on the possible death of the Dey of Algiers: "[When] the Dey of Algiers goes to his long home his successor will not renew the peace with the United States without . . . a promise of a shop load of maritime and military stores and a regala of watches, cloaths, . . . &c&c&c." Richard O'Brien, "Captain O'Brien's Negotiations in Barbary," not dated, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 3, NARA.

Countrymen immediately." Additionally, Adams agreed on Jefferson's points on honor, stating that "we might obtain the Glory of finally breaking up these nests of Banditti."[96] In all these points, Adams concurred with his friend and colleague, and his attitude toward the Barbary States was far more bellicose than many scholars have admitted.[97]

Instead, Adams' disagreement with Jefferson originated from pragmatism. The first counterargument that Adams presented was that "Congress will never, or at least not for years, take any such Resolution [naval armament], and in the mean time our Trade and *Honour* suffers beyond Calculation."[98] Adams thus effectively repurposed the concern over honor by first pointing to the improbability of going to war with Algiers under the present form of government (the Articles of Confederation) and then highlighting the ongoing national embarrassment of having suspended most trade in the Mediterranean. In this context, the Americans already captured by Algerians constituted an additional concern, as they continued to make visible America's incapability of resolving a comparatively minute issue.

Adams then reiterated some economic arguments for buying peace. He criticized Jefferson's argument that France had recently quelled all demands for tribute by pointing out that, even then, the requisite consular presents were still presented to the ruler of Algiers. He concluded the section by rhetorically asking "Did any Nation ever make Peace with any one Barbary State, without making the Presents? . . . I believe not."[99] Adams reasoned that presents were required in either case. However, building a navy "at the Expence of Millions," when peace could be bought cheaply in the present moment, Adams concluded, would simply not be worth the trouble.[100] Adams strengthened his argument by pointing out that Algiers' navy had been strengthened since the time of the French conflict and that fortifications had been constructed in the harbor of Algiers. The North African city-state, Adams proposed, was thus a much more formidable antagonist than Jefferson had assumed. Lastly, Adams pointed out that even if there would be war with Algiers, the remaining Barbary States were still unaccounted for and that American commerce would therefore remain exposed.[101]

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[96] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, July 31, 1786, *PTJ*, 10:176

[97] Even as early as 1963, James Aloysius Carr has argued that Adams was not opposed to fighting the Barbary States on general principle but rather that "Adams' opposition to Jefferson's militancy was based on a realistic appraisal of the situation which all too many historians fail to point out when contrasting the positions of the two men during the period under discussion." See, "John Adams and the Barbary Problem: The Myth and the Record," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1963), 40. Even many contemporary historians have echoed the sentiment of a pusillanimous Adams. See, for example, Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 635.

[98] Emphasis added. John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, July 31, 1786, *PTJ*, 10:176–177.

[99] Ibid., 10:177.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

Ultimately, Adams ended his letter on an even more pessimistic note. The inefficacy of the US government, in Adams' view, doomed prospects of either a diplomatic or a military solution: "I perceive that neither Force nor Money will be applied. Our States are so backward that they will do nothing for some years."[102] (In this assessment, Adams proved almost prophetically correct.) American inaction, in combination with the suspension of trade in the Mediterranean, he concluded, "is more humiliating to me, than giving the Presents would be."[103] Once more, Adams took into consideration the international embarrassment inherent in the overall situation.

Jefferson did not offer a rebuttal. It seems as if the issue remained unresolved for some years, and it was not until after the ratification of the Constitution and the capture of another one hundred Americans that the US government sprang to action. Still, the exchange between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson remains relevant, as it provides some understanding of the arguments surrounding this issue. In this dispute, both men put forth their ideas in scholarly fashion. They carefully weighed their options and took into consideration a variety of factors before presenting each other with their conclusions. Considering that this exchange took place (more or less privately) between two close friends would also indicate that the ideas were proposed with more genuine conviction when compared to, for example, presenting arguments to the public.[104] The idea that US national honor must be preserved and protected (amidst fears of international and moreover public humiliation) was nevertheless characterized as a self-serving rationale – an obvious, logical supposition – by both Adams and Jefferson, although the two had different opinions on the most effective strategy to achieve this end.[105]

As has been demonstrated, Jefferson repeatedly called for the US government to build a navy and fight the Barbary States on their own. But this notwithstanding, Jefferson also accepted Adams' criticism to an extent in that he proposed to form an alliance with smaller European countries to combat the Barbary States in a joint effort. The idea of cooperating with other European nations to form an American-led defensive alliance to counter the Barbary States became a continuous thread in Jefferson's correspondence. In this respect, Jefferson was once more heavily influenced by Emer de Vattel, whose *The Law of Nations* formed the

[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 10:178
[104] An alternative interpretation might be that Adams and Jefferson were aware that their correspondence might be made public at some later date and thus presented their arguments in accordance with the social expectations of the time. The prevalence of rhetoric surrounding the notions of national honor stands out in both cases.
[105] Another possible explanation for their diverging opinions in this context may be the two diplomats' origin. Jefferson, a southerner, may have put a far greater emphasis on the protection of national honor than his northern counterpart. A recent study indicates that southerners were more likely throughout American history to use force in order to protect American honor. See Allan Dafoe and Devin Caughey, "Honor and War: Southern US Presidents and the Effects of Concern for Reputation" *World Politics* 68 (2016).

foundation for this undertaking. In it, Vattel proposed "forming a confederacy against the states of Barbary, in order to destroy those haunts of pirates."[106] Jefferson began working on this project shortly after Algiers had captured the first American citizens.

Like Jefferson's position in general, the idea of an international alliance against the Barbary States was radical. To Jefferson, the idea must have been of major importance, as he repeatedly revived efforts to form such an alliance at later times and even included it in his autobiography. According to the "Proposals for concerted operation among the powers at war with the piratical States of Barbary," all states willing "shall enter into a convention to carry on their operation against those States, in concert, beginning with the Algerines."[107] Open to all nations wishing to join it, the aim was to end the system of tribute in favor of "perpetual peace."[108] Each member of the confederation would provide part of a naval fleet that would jointly bring an end to the enslavement of European and American sailors.

The proposal is by and large a testimony to both Jefferson's utter disdain for Barbary corsairing as well as political opportunism. While Jefferson personally favored a powerful American navy capable of bringing the fight to North Africa, he likely took into account the possibility that an entire fleet would not materialize under the Articles of Confederation. But perhaps he reasoned that one or two frigates might be built under the banner of an international coalition. The suggestion to first subdue Algiers was of course a direct response to the preceding enslavement of American citizens there. In addition, Algiers had close ties to Great Britain. Therefore, a joint effort against the regency can also be interpreted as antagonistic toward England's interest. Bringing together less powerful countries such as Naples and Portugal might have worked as a counterforce to Europe's most authoritative actor.

Furthermore, if the proposed confederation of nations – initiated by the newly founded American republic – would prove successful, this would certainly send a message to the world that the United States would act as the harbinger of Enlightenment principles by ending the submission to Muslim countries. In this context, the United States could present itself as a new progressive power that would not capitulate to Barbary piracy, expose European weakness, while at the same time inviting European states to join the collective effort against a common enemy. In addition, the confederation could counteract the more dominant powers of Europe.

[106] Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 163.
[107] Thomas Jefferson, "Autobiography" in *The Life and Selected Writings of Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Random House, 1944), 68.
[108] Ibid., 68.

At last, the plan proved to be too ambitious. When first proposed, several countries, including Portugal, Naples, Sicily, Malta, Denmark, and Sweden, showed interest in the idea.[109] In the end, fearful of retaliation from either France or Great Britain, the smaller states of Europe abandoned the idea, and the United States was once more left alone in dealing with the Barbary States.[110] Nevertheless, the proposal shows that Europe was at all times indispensable in Thomas Jefferson's calculations of how to deal with the issue of North African corsairing. In his schemes, he always seemed to consider how the United States would be perceived in Europe, and he did much to ensure a most favorable impression across the Atlantic.

It is important to note, however, that Thomas Jefferson's proposal, though pugnacious, did not propose a colonial venture akin to the French colonization of Algiers in 1830. Instead, he argued for continuous naval supremacy: "A small effort, but long continued, seems to be the only method . . . [and by] suppressing their marine and trade totally . . . these nests of banditti might be reformed."[111] Thus, the proposal would leave squadrons of warships in constant cruise in the Mediterranean, hoping to bankrupt the Barbary States by gradually depriving them of their main source of income: tribute and ransom.

While this strategy might seem defensive, and comparatively tame in comparison to the imperialistic *mission civilisatrice* employed by the French and British throughout the 19th century, this is not to suggest that Americans regarded the Barbary States as legitimate nations as such. The strategy to join forces with other European nations to suppress the naval operations of these regencies is already indicative of this, but Jefferson's characterization of North Africans as "banditti" and "barbarians" confirms that these states were placed outside the realm of the supposedly civilized countries.[112]

In the end, the Articles of Confederation failed for several reasons, among them that this system of government ultimately proved inadequate to address foreign relations. The lack of a strong executive and the requirements of at least nine states to be in agreement to bring about any meaningful legislation ultimately kept the government from addressing the many issues facing the nascent country. As a result, the United States never built a navy during this time, nor was a confederation with smaller European powers formed. However, after the Philadelphia Convention ended with the ratification of a new constitution, the prospect of arming against the Barbary States seemed once again within reach for Thomas Jefferson.

[109] Ibid., 70.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, February 6, 1785, *PTJ*, 7:640.
[112] Thomas Jefferson to John Paul Jones, March 23, 1789, *PTJ*, 14:688.

It did not take long for Jefferson to officially propose the use of force against Algiers in order to free the American captives and secure American trading rights in the Mediterranean. Roughly a year after the Constitution had taken effect, Jefferson made his case for going to war with Algiers in three separate documents which he, now serving as the first secretary of state, communicated to Congress. They were titled "A Proposal to Use Force Against the Barbary States," "Report on American Trade in the Mediterranean," and "Report on American Captives in Algiers." And while each of these had a slightly different focus, they all arrived at the same conclusion: "to repress Force by Force."[113] These reports included various details of Algiers' strategic advantages and disadvantages, but they ultimately reiterated the argument that a peace treaty (in combination with tribute and ransom) would be undesirable.

The arguments Jefferson presented showed that he had considered possible objections. Echoing John Adams' earlier concerns, the report addressed Algiers' harbor fortifications as well as its fleet.[114] In addition, Jefferson presented his case by considering the relatively remote geographic location of the United States when compared to other European countries, stressing that American ships – when entering the Mediterranean – had to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar, a narrow passage that was regularly sought out by North African corsairs. Jefferson even speculated upon the consequences of Portugal neglecting to patrol the straits: "the Atlantic will immediately become the principal Scene of their Piracies."[115] (In 1793, this sequence of events would become reality and lead to the capture of over one hundred further Americans by Algerian cruisers.)

In addition to these strategic considerations, Jefferson added ideological arguments. Jefferson previously utilized the language of national honor in his private correspondence, and he also did not hesitate to make similar arguments in public – in this case by addressing

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[113] Thomas Jefferson, "Report on American Captives in Algiers," December 28, 1790, *PTJ*, 18:435.

[114] Jefferson also discussed the role of the Ottoman Sultan in Constantinople. After all, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli were all formally part of the Ottoman Empire. He discounted the importance of this fact and even speculated that the United States might engage in war with the Turkish empire: "Hence it follows that Algiers and Tripoli are always part of the Ottoman Empire, and that Congress should not make any scruple in reimbursing themselves on all the subjects of the Grand Seignior for the unprofitable cruises which their vessels shall make on the coasts of Barbary. The Turks and the Greeks have many coasting vessels in the Archipelago. It is also probable that this Navigation will be much encouraged in the issue of the present War, and the numerous prizes which the United States may take from them, will not only largely pay the expences of the armaments, but make the Porte [Constantinople] feel that it is important for her to cause a cessation of hostilities, against which she has no means of reprisal. Congress with regard to Turkey will find themselves in a much more advantageous situation, than that of the States of Barbary with regard to the commercial Powers of Europe, as the latter are not sheltered from bombardments, and on the contrary the enemies of Congress have not even an idea of the route to the States." Thomas Jefferson, "A Proposal to Use Force against the Barbary States," July 12, 1790, *PTJ*, 18:419. Ultimately, however, all of this came to nothing, and it is worth noting that when the *USS George Washington* first entered the port of Constantinople in 1800, the United States was not even heard of. See William Bainbridge to Secretary of the Navy, November 17, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:444.

[115] Thomas Jefferson, "Report on American Trade in the Mediterranean," December 28, 1790, *PTJ*, 18:428

Congress. Whereas the correspondence between Jefferson and Adams would indicate that Jefferson made his arguments from genuine conviction, he could also have invoked the concept of honor as a rhetorical strategy to convince the lawmakers to go to war. Either explanation suffices to testify for the immense importance of the concept of national honor, in this context among the American political elite.

After resolutely dismissing the idea that the Barbary States might become a legitimate trading partner for the United States, Jefferson discussed the prospect of buying a peace treaty: "A Second Plan might be, to obtain Peace by purchasing it. For this we have the Example of rich and powerful Nations, in this Instance counting their Interest more than their *Honor*."[116] Once more, the operating principle for Jefferson's proposed foreign policy was the cultivation of US national honor. In this instance, the idea was contrasted to the idea of "interest," i.e. paying ransom and tribute to protect European commerce which, Jefferson thus tacitly admitted, was less costly than continued warfare with the Barbary States.

Jefferson went on to speculate that peace with Algiers would probably cost the United States one million dollars. Whether or not the demands were comparable to other European nations (revealing the international standing of the United States) was difficult to ascertain, according to Jefferson. Regarding this, there was another allusion to honor, or more precisely its violation through humiliation: On European nations that were paying tribute, Jefferson commented that "from a principle of self-condemnation, the Governments keep them [the amount of tribute] from the public Eye as much as possible."[117] Here, Jefferson issues a subtle warning that the United States was especially vulnerable to public backlash should such payments become public knowledge.[118] After all, the republican form of government granted a certain amount of transparency, even when it came to foreign relations.

Jefferson further strengthened his case by pointing out that any treaty would be unreliable. He first invoked the dey's advanced age: "On the Death of a Dey (and the present one is between seventy and eighty Years of Age) respectable Presents must be made to the Successor, that he may recognize the Treaty, and very often he takes the Liberty of altering it."[119] He added that even though France had recently renewed their peace treaty (which still included presents at regular intervals), the French Revolution had led Algiers to seize a number

[116] Emphasis added. Ibid., 18:425.
[117] Ibid., 18:427.
[118] The XYZ Affair constitutes an early example of public pressure resulting from matters of foreign policy. In this instance, Federalists exploited public outrage over the corruption of French diplomats to consolidate their political power and pass legislation. For an extensive discussion on this topic, see Jasper Trautsch, *The Genesis of America: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Formation of National Identity, 1793–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 107–130.
[119] Thomas Jefferson, "Report on American Trade in the Mediterranean," December 28, 1790, *PTJ*, 18:426.

of French vessels. Given the example of France, Jefferson contended that any negotiated peace by the United States would likewise be on a similar footing. These were Jefferson's principal reasons for preferring war to diplomacy.

It may perhaps seem counterintuitive that only twenty-one sailors would cause such a substantive discussion. The extensive correspondence of numerous members of the early American political elite demonstrate that the issue was taken very seriously. However, many of the arguments did not center around the plight of those individuals captured in Algiers. Instead, the captures were by and large used as a pretext to make larger points about the United States' place in the world. As Lawrence Peskin has argued:

> Barbary captivity particularly disturbed early national Americans not so much because of the statistical risk or the pain it caused individuals (although that was a concern), but because of what it revealed about the new nation as a whole. As an actual occurrence, it was no doubt troubling, but as a metaphor for dependence and subservience, captivity was devastating, and that is why it generated so much interest.[120]

It is from this broader perspective that the remarks made by Jefferson and others should be analyzed.

This point is illustrated by none other than Thomas Jefferson himself. Despite all his insistence on national honor, the individual plight of the American captives was rarely invoked. In his "Report on American Captives in Algiers," he noted that he had actively and purposefully ignored the pleas of the American captives up until that point:

> To destroy, therefore, every Expectation of a Redemption by the United States, the Bills . . . for the Sustenance of our Captives, were not answered. On the Contrary, a Hint was given that these Advances had better be discontinued, as it was not known that they would be reimbursed. It was necessary even to go further, and to suffer the Captives themselves and their Friends to believe, for a while that no Attention was paid to them, no Notice taken of their Letters. They are still under this Impression.[121]

It becomes clear that Jefferson was primarily occupied with maintaining America's reputation while fearful of suffering the shame of paying too high a ransom.[122] Jefferson's actions may thus have led to greater hardships for the American captives. Jefferson only briefly referenced

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[120] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 212.

[121] Thomas Jefferson, "Report on American Captives in Algiers," December 28, 1790, *PTJ*, 18:432–433.

[122] This was also a risky strategy, because the portrayal of the United States as feeble might also have complicated the procurement of loans in Europe: "To buy peace cheaply, Americans needed to portray themselves as small and weak, but if they downplayed their power too much, European lenders would see them as credit risks and traders would see an opportunity to edge them out of the markets." See Hannah Farber, "Millions for Credit: Peace with Algiers and the Establishment of America's Commercial Reputation Overseas, 1795–96," *Journal of the Early Republic* 34 (2014): 201.

their current situation: "Of ours six have died."[123] No request was made to provide some relief for the families of the victims who might have depended on the income of these sailors. It becomes clear Jefferson was more than willing to sacrifice American sailors to protect the standing of the United States within the greater context of international relations.

Up until 1790, the prospect of going to war with Algiers, as has been shown, was an idea seriously entertained by many American statesmen. The prevailing attitude expressed in this context was that Algiers would be easily defeated should the United States opt to build a navy. In addition to other reasons, such as uniting the American people against a common enemy, many of these early proponents for a navy invoked the idea of national honor repeatedly to justify going to war with the Barbary States.

However, Jefferson stands out as particularly devoted in this context. The arguments for a navy centered around the idea of protecting and maintaining US national honor and protecting American exports (particularly the excesses of American farming). In this, he was challenged on pragmatic grounds by his friend and colleague John Adams who nevertheless agreed that a military conflict with Algiers would advance America's standing in Europe. As soon as the United States government was equipped with the means of realizing a naval buildup, Jefferson reiterated his arguments, once more stressing that it would be humiliating for the United States to emulate the European tradition of paying tribute and ransom. The maintenance and protection of national honor was thus a central aspect around which the argument for going to war revolved.

**Return to Reality: Joel Barlow's Mission in Algiers**

Despite Jefferson's ambitions, the United States remained without a navy. And yet in the meantime, there was pressure to do something about the American slaves in Algiers. The policy of feigning indifference toward the captives proved difficult to maintain, because of America's relatively recent triumph over the British. If the United States was capable of defeating Europe's most powerful empire, Algerians wondered, how could the same people then be incapable of paying a generous ransom?[124] In addition, the captives received comparatively high stipends from 1792 onward,[125] and a group of private citizens were

[123] Thomas Jefferson, "Report on American Captives in Algiers," December 28, 1790, *PTJ*, 18:434.
[124] In a letter to Richard O'Brien, fellow slave James Cathcart explained that the Dey of Algiers regarded the United States as a "rising nation" after it had emerged victoriously from the war with Great Britain. See James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, November 21, 1794, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA.
[125] The American minister in Lisbon, David Humphreys, provided some of these relief funds for the captives. This appears to have been quite a novelty: "The Idea that a nation should pay a subsistence allowance to its captive

successful in redeeming one individual, much to Jefferson's chagrin.[126] Thus, official US policy was by and large seen as unsuccessful, when Jefferson finally convinced George Washington to commission John Paul Jones to go to Algiers in mid-1792 – some seven years after the crews of the *Maria* and *Dauphin* had fallen victim to Algerian cruisers.

In Jones' letter of commission, Jefferson acknowledged the failure on the part of the United States to keep up the policy of neglect, but he nevertheless repeatedly stressed the importance of keeping the price "at the lowest sum practicable."[127] Furthermore, Jefferson once more brought up the prospect of sending a naval squadron to the Mediterranean to ensure peaceful relations with Algiers: "we look forward to the necessity of coercion by cruises on their coast."[128] For this purpose, Jones was requested to report back any and all information relating to the Algerian fleet. Indeed, the selection of Jones in itself – a naval commander during the Revolution – can be interpreted as a belligerent choice for a diplomatic post.

Alas, Jones died shortly after he had been chosen as emissary. Jefferson's second choice for the job, Thomas Barclay – who had been successful in negotiating a peace treaty with Morocco – also died shortly after being commissioned. The search for a suitable replacement caused temporary inaction on the part of the United States. Finally, almost a year later, in 1793, David Humphreys, American minister to Portugal, was commissioned to go to Algiers. Humphreys unnecessarily traveled to the United States after his commission, which "translated into a net loss of another full year in negotiations."[129] Turnover in the State Department also added to the confusion. Jefferson resigned as secretary of state by the end of 1793.[130] His successor, Edmund Randolph, was left with little information on the current state of Barbary affairs.[131]

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citizens was altogether revolutionary in North Africa." See H.G. Barnby, *The Prisoners of Algiers: An Account of the Forgotten American-Algerian War 1785–1797* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 189.

[126] In a letter to John Paul Jones, Jefferson complained that these endeavors "run directly counter to our plan, which was to avoid the appearance of any purpose on our part ever to ransom our captives." See Thomas Jefferson to John Paul Jones, June 1, 1792, *PTJ*, 24:5.

[127] Ibid., 24:6.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Edward M. Cifelli, *David Humphreys* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 89.

[130] Jefferson's principal reason for resigning was disagreement with members of Washington's cabinet, specifically Alexander Hamilton. See Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 114.

[131] A letter to David Humphreys by the new Secretary of State, Edmund Randolph, included the following questions: "1. What are the nations, bordering on the Mediterranean, who are generally exposed to the ravages of the Algerines — 2. What naval force those nations have been accustomed to employ, or can, in case of exertion, employ against Algerines. 3. Is it probable that they would associate with us, to restrain the Algerines; and upon what terms? 4. Upon what terms is it probable that they would furnish a stated armament, equal to the object, without any Ships being supplied by the United States. 5. Which of the Mediterranean Powers who are commonly at war with Algiers, have been debauched from it, *by the interposition of Great Britain, or any other Government*." See Secretary of State to David Humphreys, January 20, 1794, *Naval Documents*, I:62-63. These questions show that Randolph had little to no experience in dealing with the Barbary States and was likely overwhelmed with this task, particularly after the second round of captures.

The early 1790s proved to be a very tumultuous time for American foreign policy in general. At the beginning of 1793, the French Revolution culminated in the execution of Louis XVI, as well as France entering a war with Great Britain. This led to George Washington issuing the famous Proclamation of Neutrality in response to the conflict. That same year, the Portuguese-Algerian truce led to the enslavement of over one hundred additional American citizens which complicated the proposed negotiations even further, and the American citizenry pressured the government to act.[132] After allegations were made public that the British consul in Algiers had negotiated the truce with Portugal (which enabled the captures), anti-British hysteria brought the United States and the United Kingdom "at the brink of war."[133] Hostilities were only narrowly evaded by the diplomatic efforts of John Jay which resulted in the "Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation" of 1795 (commonly referred to as the "Jay Treaty").[134]

Against this backdrop, Congress, somewhat reluctantly, authorized the establishment of a small naval force. The "Act to Provide Naval Armament" of 1794 authorized the building of six frigates. The act's preamble cites the "depredations committed by the Algerine corsairs on the commerce of the United States" as the principal motive for the establishment of the navy. This provision was likely included in order avoid antagonizing other European powers (especially the British[135]) and make it clear that US naval armament was "about Algiers and only Algiers."[136] To further underscore this idea, the Democratic-Republicans, also skeptical of granting the government too much power, amended the bill to include a provision to stop all proceedings should peace with Algiers be achieved prior to the frigates' purchase or construction.[137]

Simultaneously, American diplomats were intensifying their endeavors after the second round of captures. In the end, David Humphreys' emissary Joseph Donaldson, in concert with

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[132] For the public response to the second round of captures, see Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations," and David J. Dzurec III, "'A Speedy Release to Our Suffering Captive Brethren in Algiers': Captives, Debate, and Public Opinion in the Early American Republic," *The Historian* 71 (2009).

[133] Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1970), 116.

[134] The treaty is often credited with averting a possibly "disastrous" war with Great Britain. See Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 188. See also Combs, *The Jay Treaty*, 187.

[135] While antagonizing European powers was certainly a concern, building a naval force might also have been an attempt to garner respect by other nations, specifically France and Great Britain. See, George C. Daughan, *If by Sea: The Forging of the American Navy – From the American Revolution to the War of 1812* (Basic Books: New York, 2008), 281.

[136] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 119.

[137] In the end, six Democratic-Republicans voted for the act. Without their support, the bill would have failed. See, Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 120. See also Ian W. Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 43. Unsurprisingly, the stop clause was ultimately violated, because peace with Algiers was achieved when the frigates were already under construction. Of the six, three frigates were ultimately christened under this bill: these were the *Constitution*, *Constellation*, and *United States*.

the American captive James Cathcart, was able to negotiate a peace treaty which ended up costing almost one million dollars in addition to annual tribute in naval stores worth approximately $21,000. In spite of all the extensive discussions about how peace with Algiers was to be achieved, the treaty was drawn up fairly quickly after Donaldson arrived in Algiers, and hardly any of the authoritative engineers of American foreign policy were directly involved in this process.[138] Afterward, Joel Barlow became the most high-profile diplomat entrusted with Barbary affairs. He arrived in Algiers on March 4, 1796, after the negotiation had been concluded but when delays in the procurement of money threatened the US-Algerian treaty before it could even take effect. Barlow's letters to the secretary of state and his colleague David Humphreys show that his main concern was to finally have the American captives released (thus ending an internationally embarrassing situation) and preserve peace on the best possible terms.

Barlow's extensive correspondence with his colleagues provide detailed insights into how US diplomats, as well as the American political elite more broadly, perceived the Barbary States and European countries, also in the context of (national) honor. However, Barlow's perspective stands out in that he was the singular high-level diplomat to actually visit Algiers, thus experiencing the realities of dealing with one of the Barbary States directly. Unlike Jefferson's ideological musings from afar, Barlow was compelled to make difficult choices that directly impacted the plight of the American captives. Still, the Barbary States (in this case specifically Algiers) remained excluded from the discourse surrounding "civilized" nations. Even when Orientalist tropes and the characterization of North African peoples as "barbarians" are discounted, this view was also evident in Barlow's writings and actions while in Algiers. Barlow's main concern was saving the peace treaty with Algiers and thus ensuring that the American captives were released. For this, Barlow felt free to use any means necessary.

Only one month after arriving, Barlow wrote a lengthy letter to David Humphreys who had been formally responsible for the treaty with Algiers. In it, Barlow was highly critical of Humphreys' approach to the peace treaty, asserting that it "differs very widely from a treaty you make with other governments." Conventionally, he went on, a treaty "must be ratified by the advice of the senate to render it executable." This, according to Barlow, was in this instance not necessary: "A treaty with Algiers . . . may be contained in one word. This word is peace." As a consequence, other stipulations in the treaty were simply "inserted for the sake of form,"

[138] James Cathcart asserted that it took less than forty-two hours after Donaldson had arrived in Algiers. See, Cathcart, *The Captives*, 188. For a detailed reconstruction of the negotiations, see also Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 93–102.

but Barlow asserted they were "of very little if any use at all."[139] What can be discerned from these statements is that Barlow did not regard Algiers on an equal footing with the United States.

This sentiment is also evident in Barlow's actions during his stay in Algiers. Acknowledging the importance of diplomatic representation in Algiers, he reported to the secretary of state that "among the few ideas familiar to his [the dey's] mind (and it is impossible to force a new one into it) are those of Consul, vice Consul & Secretary."[140] Because President Washington had not yet appointed a consul (to be ratified by the Senate), Barlow thought it most expedient to simply pretend to have been the officially appointed diplomat to represent the United States in Algiers. He expressed no concern over the credibility of this ploy, reporting that "common report that a man is one thing or the other is enough for him."[141] Joel Barlow's letter to Humphreys as well as his taking up the role as consul thus show a condescending attitude toward the North African regencies.

To take up the role of a diplomat for the United States without appointment might have constituted a serious offense during negotiations with another country. In addition, Barlow actively violated his instructions in assuming this role. However, the State Department did not take issue with his actions. Instead, he was lauded: "your assuming the character of Consul, . . . was certainly well timed. In a Country where principles are unknown . . . it has been fortunate for the United States that their interests were at so critical a period in the hands of a citizen who had intelligence to discern and confidence to serve the fittest moments to secure them."[142] Barlow's actions, despite being technically illegal under the Constitution, were thus given official approval by the government.

Barlow's behavior, and its sanction by the State Department, thus make it evident that in spite of the comparatively weak position the United States occupied, the Barbary States were regarded as placed entirely outside the realm of national honor. Within the "the tripartite division with which Americans imagined the Republic's international relations," the European countries were regarded as equal counterparts (even during occasional hostilities), whereas the Barbary States were not given that courtesy.[143] In this framework, only Native American tribes on the North American continent were regarded with even more contempt.[144] In either case,

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[139] Joel Barlow to David Humphreys, Algiers, April 3, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[140] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, April 17, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Timothy Pickering to Joel Barlow, December 3, 1796, Diplomatic and Consular Instructions of the Department of State, 1791–1801, M28, Roll 3, NARA.
[143] Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 12.
[144] Ibid., 12.

neither "treaty-worthiness," nor Emer de Vattel's principles of equality among states were fully acknowledged.[145]

Barlow's prejudiced outlook, in combination with ignorance of many aspects and customs surrounding negotiations with the Barbary States, contributed to several actions that ran counter to Barlow's instructions during his stay in Algiers.[146] After numerous threats were issued to nullify the peace treaty (because of outstanding debts on behalf of the United States), Barlow decided to promise the Dey of Algiers a frigate of thirty-six guns.[147] Not only was Barlow not authorized to make such a promise, but this course of action was in violation of directives issued by the State Department in the letter of commission to John Paul Jones: "we will not furnish them naval stores, because we think it not right to furnish them means which we know they will employ to do wrong."[148] If materials for building and maintaining ships were not to be provided, then surely supplying a potentially hostile state with an American-build warship capable of preying on US trading vessels would also run counter to US foreign policy goals at the time.

And yet, Barlow asserted that giving the dey a ship of war would secure a durable peace. The frigate, he argued, would make a lasting impression and was thus preferable to handing out more conventional gifts, such as diamonds or gold-plated weapons: "Such objects are stored away . . . and the next week he forgets from whence they came. But this [frigate] will be an object perpetually before his eyes, it will be the admiration of all his friends and remind them every moment of their friend[ship to] the Americans."[149] As can be seen, Barlow's reason for making such a generous offer was influenced by his assessment of the dey as both an impressionable and forgetful simpleton who was frequently governed by infantile passions.[150]

As far as can be reconstructed, the promise did not cause any major controversy in the State Department. Despite clearly "sticking his neck out," Barlow was never seriously scolded for so bold an offer.[151] George Washington commented that it was "disagreeable" but added

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[145] Ibid., 12.
[146] In addition, Barlow frequently asserted that he was eager to leave Algiers which might have contributed to favoring a speedy conclusion of the negotiations.
[147] Richard Buel Jr., *Joel Barlow: American Citizen in a Revolutionary World* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 203.
[148] Secretary of State to John Paul Jones, June 1, 1792, *Naval Documents*, I:38.
[149] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, October 18, 1 796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[150] In fact, Barlow once directly compared the Dey to a child when describing his strategy: "I had indeed procured from the Jews a promise to the Dey to be answerable for the whole of our money, at the same time that they paid into the treasury the price of the redemption to let off the people. But this was only the rattle given to the child while you take away the pen knife. – He amuses himself a moment, till he finds the knife is gone, and then throws away the rattle, & curses his little stars, as well as he can, for haveing given up the knife." Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, Algiers, October 18, 1 796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[151] Richard B, Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 113.

understandingly that "there appeared no other alternative but to comply, or to submit to the depredations of the Barbary Corsairs on our Citizens, and Commerce."[152] A pragmatic approach prevailed, and the frigate *Crescent* was eventually built and delivered in 1798.[153]

Barlow went even further and speculated that the United States could become the supplier of warships for Algiers. He argued that "giving commissions for building cruisers in America, may be one of the means of perpetuating our peace."[154] However, Barlow stressed that these commissions should be issued exclusively by the government, as he expressed fears of "American speculators in Algiers offering contracts . . . with a design to defraud the Musselmen. And such frauds will be revenged on the nations."[155] Lastly, Barlow thought that it might be a good idea, because these ships could carry the annual tribute to Algiers, thus saving the US government freight costs.[156]

Barlow's proposals were not implemented as a long-term policy by the US government. In fact, the instructions to the first officially appointed consul to Algiers included the following: "The building of armed vessels for the Dey . . . the Government of the United States would willingly have avoided . . . But the critical situation of our affairs left us no alternative. In time to come, however, we shall be pleased if further engagements of this kind could be avoided."[157] Thus, the State Department continued not to (further) arm the potentially hostile Barbary States with warships, presumably because they could be used against the American merchant marine. Additionally, there might have been concerns over European nations taking notice and retaliating against the United States for arming an enemy country.

And yet, in the short term, Barlow reported that his diplomatic conduct had established the United States as a uniquely respected country in Algiers. Barlow alleged that the Dey of Algiers had a "secret esteem for the American nation superior to what he has for any other."[158] Barlow further stated that the dey, as ruler of the most powerful North African state, would be able to guarantee peaceful relations with the remaining Barbary States. These factors were used by Barlow to justify the extravagant presents and guarantees he offered the dey on behalf of the United States.

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[152] George Washington to Secretary of War, July 13, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:166.
[153] Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 112.
[154] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, October 18, 1 796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Secretary of State to Richard O'Brien, December 29, 1797, *Naval Documents*, I:233.
[158] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, April 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.

More immediately, Barlow's promise to deliver a frigate in conjunction with presents, a generous ransom payment, and provisions for annual tribute brought about the redemption of the American captives who left Algiers in July of 1796. Barlow still lamented the "extravagant sums of money" the treaty with Algiers had cost and called the payments a "humiliation."[159] In the end, Barlow had to violate the instructions of the State Department, and the treaty with Algiers also effectively nullified all other US foreign policy objectives in the Mediterranean, namely freedom from ransom and tribute. From this perspective, US foreign policy with the Barbary States (thus far mainly Algiers) can be described as largely a failure.

Whereas individuals like Barlow, who were directly involved in foreign policy with Algiers, described the means by which peace was achieved in unflattering terms, most American newspapers did not extensively comment on the news from the Mediterranean. There are numerous explanations for this. Firstly, American diplomatic relations with Great Britain was a far greater concern at the time. John Jay had recently negotiated a treaty with the British, and debate over its contents dominated newspapers since the details of the treaty were first published in July of 1795 and continued well into the next year. While numerous scholars have argued that the treaty likely prevented war with Britain,[160] the treaty was nevertheless extremely controversial at the time and contributed to divide Americans among ideological lines (in this case Antifederalist Francophiles and Federalist Anglophiles).[161] In addition, the arrival of the prisoners on American shores did not coincide with the news of the peace treaty reaching the United States. Because the plague broke out on the ship that was carrying the former American captives, the vessel was quarantined for months in the harbor of Marseilles.

When the captives arrived in America on February 8, 1797, international turmoil once more framed the public debate. As a result, "the captives were soon yesterday's news. The Algerian crisis had been resolved for well over a year, and the war in Europe, especially the growing hostility of France toward the United States, was now a far bigger and more immediate concern."[162] French vessels had already begun to disrupt American commerce in the Caribbean, and the diplomatic relations with Revolutionary France began to deteriorate from this point onward.[163] In comparison to France and Great Britain, the remote regency of Algiers most likely

[159] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, July 12, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:165.
[160] Combs, *The Jay Treaty*, 187. See also Matthew Rainbow Hale, "'Many Who Wandered in Darkness': The Contest over American National Identity, 1795–1798, *Early American Studies* 1 (2003): 154.
[161] For a detailed analysis of the public debate over the Jay Treaty, see Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst & London, 2006), 104–126.
[162] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 130.
[163] Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi-War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797–1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 9.

did not loom as large in the minds of most Americans as to cause any serious controversy over the payment of tribute and ransom.

**The Captive's Experience: American Perspectives from Algiers**

When the American captives first set foot on Algerian soil in 1785, they did not hesitate to describe themselves as slaves. However, their experience differed substantially from the kind of slavery practiced in the United States. Perhaps the most important difference between American chattel slavery and Algerian captivity was the prospect of redemption. The Barbary States did not enslave European and American sailors with the intention of keeping their captives in permanent bondage. Ransom payments in combination with annual tribute constituted the primary source of income for the Barbary States, and many European countries had established diplomatic networks throughout the Mediterranean that were concerned with the redemption of captives.[164] Sailors could therefore maintain the hope of one day returning to their home countries.

In addition to ransom, conversion to Islam was another possibility to attain freedom. Because Islamic law opposed the enslavement of Muslims, some captives were emancipated after abandoning their Christian faith. This practice was not necessarily common and was usually not encouraged by Muslim masters, because it would obviously negate the prospect of ransom.[165] However, if slaves were willing to convert and could be put to good use afterwards, exceptions were sometimes made. During the First Barbary War, for example, Tripoli's top naval commander, Peter Lisle, was Scottish born. Slaves with little prospect of their home country or families ever redeeming them were thus occasionally tempted to "take the turban" or "turn Turk," as the practice was commonly called.

The type of labor that Christian slaves were forced to perform at the end of the 18th century varied substantially in terms of intensity and cruelty. In previous centuries, during the "peak of corsairing activity," perhaps the most damning fate a captive could suffer would have been that of a galley slave, "one of the most brutal forms of slave labor ever devised."[166] However, when the first Americans were captured, this practice had long fallen out of use. The captive James Cathcart even described stretches of boredom during his captivity, when he and thirteen other slaves "had not a great deal to do," because the work they were assigned "might have very well been done by four [slaves]."[167] Another American captive named John Foss,

[164] Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 8, 11.
[165] Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, 22.
[166] Ibid., 75.
[167] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 12.

however, reported that some slaves in Algiers had to work in quarries, breaking stones.[168] Because the work assigned to captives was also often dependent on individual skill, it is difficult to make general statements about the work conditions of slaves in Algiers.[169]

Slaves were also subject to many forms of discipline and physical abuse. The bastinado appears to have been among the most widespread forms of punishment for minor offenses such as insubordination.[170] In this procedure, the soles of the feet are beaten repeatedly with thick sticks. Both John Foss and James Cathcart reported that bastinados were common practice in Algiers and were often conducted arbitrarily.[171] For more serious crimes, beheading is said to have been common at the Barbary Coast, although there are no reports of Americans being subject to this form of capital punishment.[172]

One of the greatest dangers to residents in North Africa – particularly those who were assigned with little to no value other than their prospective ransom – was the plague, the "biggest killer of captives and captors alike."[173] The disease regularly made an appearance on the Barbary Coast and claimed the lives of vast swaths of the population. By 1792, the number of American captives in Algiers was almost cut in half, with only eleven out of twenty-one remaining alive.[174] Given the generally unhygienic nature of the *bagnio* (slave prison), it does not appear surprising that captives were typically most affected by the outbreak of diseases. This was one of the reasons why higher-ranking officers (such as captains) were usually provided lodging in consular houses and thus enjoyed greater protection.[175]

In addition to these immediate realities, Americans in Algiers had to endure the shame of their enslavement. Captivity carried with it the notion of emasculation and passivity: "the masculinity of each captive was potentially imperiled by his powerlessness to secure his own liberty honorably."[176] What is more, this powerlessness had to be made public; captives engaged in letter-writing campaigns to make their whereabouts known to their families and governments. "Writing, sending, and receiving letters was part of the experience of captivity,

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[168] John Foss, "A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss; several years a prisoner in Algiers: Together with some account of the treatment of Christian slaves when sick:—and observations on the manners and customs of the Algerines" in *White Slaves, African* Masters, 80.
[169] Shipbuilders, for example, were generally in high demand and treated preferentially. See Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters*, 96.
[170] Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations," 133.
[171] Foss, "A Journal of Captivity," 82, Cathcart, *The Captives*, 19.
[172] Jacob Rama Berman, *American Arabesque: Arabs, Islam, and the 19th Century Imaginary* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2012), 133.
[173] Colley, *Captives*, 55.
[174] Wilson, "American Hostages in Moslem Nations," 129.
[175] Christine E. Sears, *American Slaves and African Masters: Algiers and the Western Sahara, 1776–1820* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 74.
[176] Martha Elena Rojas, "'Insults Unpunished': Barbary Captives, American Slaves, and the Negotiation of Liberty," *Early American Studies* 2 (2003), 173.

with masters interested in hefty ransoms, especially in the case of enslaved Christians, encouraging their captives to contact their kin."[177] This meant slaves often had to repeatedly disclose their unfortunate situation to the world.

Furthermore, it was at times advantageous to exaggerate the plight of the captives in letters and reports to stress a sense of urgency and to garner sympathy. When analyzing these letters under the lens of personal honor, however, skepticism is warranted. After all, this strategy had to be balanced with the degree to which self-respecting American citizens were be willing to rhetorically debase themselves in front of their families, the American government, and – because it was not uncommon for such letters to be printed in newspapers – the public at large.

This weighing of options is exemplified in the different approaches taken by American sailors after they were captured in 1785. Captain Richard O'Brien, for instance, quickly emerged as the de facto leader of the American captives by utilizing the language of an expert in matters of foreign policy. As such, he maintained his rank (and honorable position) while providing American diplomats with vital insights into Algerian politics and customs: "his letters usually overflowed with information about Algiers and the Mediterranean that he hoped might assist his correspondents in negotiating an end to the crisis."[178] O'Brien thus did not necessarily accept his position as a slave but tried to maintain a personal sense of dignity through his writing. This was by and large possible, because he received preferential treatment as an officer (and was as such subject to a higher ransom).

This behavior can be contrasted with Isaac Stephens, the second captain who was captured in 1785. Unlike O'Brien, Stephens had a wife and children in the United States and was therefore perhaps more willing to sacrifice his personal honor for the sake of his family.[179] In his plea to Congress, he invoked the language of sensibility: "O Lord hear our petitions and prayers and cause this body of gentlemen to relieve our state of slavery and redeem us soon . . . O Lord hear the cries and prayers of my wife and children and turn the hearts of those gentlemen toward our redemption as soon as possible."[180] Portraying the captives as "charity cases," Stephens thus emphasizes his lack of agency and dependence on the American government.[181]

Finally, there is the case of James Leander Cathcart. In the following, it will be demonstrated that Cathcart utilized the rhetoric of personal and national honor to describe his

[177] Hershenzon, *The Captive Sea*, 94.
[178] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 26.
[179] Likewise, providing for your family through sacrifice might in itself be regarded as honorable behavior.
[180] Quoted in Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 32–33.
[181] Ibid., 33.

experience in Algiers. In doing so, he constructed a narrative of overcoming the shame of his own captivity as well as the international embarrassment the United States faced by having its citizens enslaved. For this purpose, Cathcart's biography will be summarized, and there will be a brief introduction to the primary sources that were consulted. Then, Cathcart's writings will be analyzed in four sections, pertaining to the most important events of Cathcart's captivity in chronological order. First, a brief episode of Cathcart showing himself optimistic will be discussed (caused by his confidence that the American captives would soon be redeemed); this is followed by a discussion of how Orientalist tropes added to a sense of shame incumbent in being a captive in Algiers (especially after the US government proved incapable of redeeming its citizens); thirdly, Cathcart's chronicling his rise to a position of influence will be presented as a rhetoric strategy of overcoming this shame; Cathcart's experience ultimately culminated in taking part in the negotiations that resulted in a peace treaty, something which Cathcart framed as a personal and national triumph.

**Honor, Shame, and Captivity: The Case of James Cathcart**

James Leander Cathcart was born in Ireland in 1767. He immigrated to America in 1779 and later joined the Continental Navy during the Revolutionary War. Reportedly, he was captured by the British but subsequently escaped. Though little is known about his military service, Cathcart later invoked his status as a veteran repeatedly as a point of pride. After the United States achieved independence, he became a merchant sailor. Like many sailors, he was literate[182] and capable of conversing in several languages, among them French, Spanish, and Portuguese.[183] In 1785, he was aboard the ship *Maria*, one of the first vessels to fall prey to the Barbary States. He was subsequently brought to Algiers, where he would remain a captive for approximately one decade.

During his captivity, Cathcart would gradually rise through the ranks of the Algerian slave society. This culminated in him attaining the position of "chief Christian clerk," a sort of secretary in charge of performing administrative duties for the Dey of Algiers and the highest position a nominal slave could attain. Additionally, Cathcart became the proprietor of three taverns in the *bagnios*, or slave prisons, providing him with a considerable income during his

[182] Literacy among sailors was comparatively widespread. As Hester Blum has argued, "periods of idleness, and thus the opportunity for reading and writing, were part of the job." See, Hester Blum, *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum American Sea Narratives* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2.
[183] Peter D. Eicher, *Raising the Flag: America's First Envoys in Faraway Lands* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2018), 37.

captivity. In 1795, peaceful relations with Algiers were established by means of a treaty Cathcart helped negotiate.

Following his release, Cathcart married in the United States. He then returned to North Africa, after he was appointed consul to the regency of Tripoli. He arrived at his post in April of 1799. During his tenure, the Bashaw of Tripoli declared war on the United States, leading to Cathcart's exile. The following years, he remained in Livorno (then referred to as "Leghorn"), where he, in collaboration with consul William Eaton (stationed in Tunis), formulated the plan to oust the Bashaw of Tripoli in order to replace him with his brother Hamet. The execution of this plan, however, rested with William Eaton. Cathcart remained in a conciliatory position in Livorno until 1805, when he left the Mediterranean and returned to the United States.

When Cathcart was captured in 1785, his background combined a variety of perspectives. He was a foreign-born white American who had served during the American Revolution, thus giving his appeals to patriotism some credibility (although his nationality became a point of contention during his captivity). Furthermore, he was a nonelite sailor without claims to any titles or prior nobility. Lastly, at the time of his capture, he was still fairly young (under twenty years old) and – as will become evident – eager to prove himself. Initially, however, there was probably little that would distinguish Cathcart from the other low-ranking American sailors, when they were captured by Algiers.

The primary reason to select Cathcart for an analysis of honor during this time period is the extensive body of writing he left behind. Cathcart's account of his experience in the Mediterranean was published under the title *The Captives* by the initiative of his daughter over fifty years after his death. This means that caution is warranted in the analysis of this book. By now, it is of course impossible to gauge in how far Cathcart's writings had been altered and edited after his death. The basis for *The Captives* was a collection of Cathcart's writings, published in the 1950s under the title "The Diplomatic Journal and Letter Book of James Leander Cathcart, 1788–1796" (hereafter referred to as *Diplomatic Journal*). Cathcart had been expanding on this material "as the basis for a long autobiographical narrative."[184] Because the manuscripts that were the foundation of the published *Diplomatic Journal* (submitted by one Ernest J. Wessen) were *also* incomplete, it remains impossible to determine how much of *The Captives* was subject to editorializing by Cathcart's daughter or how much was based on further writings not submitted to the American Antiquarian Society. In the following section, the focus

[184] "The Diplomatic Journal and Letter Book of James Leander Cathcart, 1788–1797," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 64 (1954): 303. Hereafter referred to as *Diplomatic Journal*.

lies on passages in *The Captives* that can be either verified by separate primary sources or have been corroborated by other scholars.

In addition to Cathcart's journal, the aforementioned *Diplomatic Journal* constitute a foundation for an analysis of Cathcart's stay in Algiers. Moreover, there remains his correspondence with naval officers as well as diplomats as part of the "Consular Despatches" (stored in the National Archives) that were also published in part in *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with The Barbary Powers*. These documents make it possible to gain further insights into how Cathcart's made sense of his experiences and verify certain claims made in *The Captives*.

While part of his writings takes the form of a personal journal, this does not mean there was no wider audience in mind. For one, abstracts of diaries and even whole letters were regularly copied and enclosed in reports to superiors or colleagues as additional information "to help smooth American-Algerian negotiations."[185] Moreover, it was not uncommon at the time that personal letters would be published in newspapers if their content was thought of as interesting, informative, or relevant in any other way.[186] Therefore, for any analytical purposes, these sources were written with the knowledge that they would be critically examined by a variety of individuals and could possibly be made public.

Cathcart's writings must therefore be understood as a personal account to be presented to his peers or even the American public. Cathcart personally sent his journal to diplomats as background information and even President Adams prior to their meeting in Philadelphia.[187] Scholars such as Martha E. Rojas have thus concluded that "Cathcart's journal, then, is a record kept with circulation, if not publication, explicitly in mind."[188] It then becomes necessary to treat all these sources as carefully drafted constructions of the self, pursuing very specific goals.

When Cathcart arrived in Algiers in 1785, he appeared to be optimistic that his captivity would not last long. He therefore decided to have the stigma of slavery not injure his keen sense of self-worth: "being confident that our country would immediately redeem us, I resolved to bear my captivity with as good a grace as possible and not give the Mahometans the satisfaction

[185] Brett Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire: Three Barbary Captives and American Nation-Building, 1770–1840," (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2016), 45.
[186] Martha Elena Rojas, "Diplomatic Letters: The Conduct and Culture of U.S. Foreign Affairs in the Early Republic," (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2003), 161–162. See also: Joanne B. Freeman, "Slander, Poison, Whispers, and Fame: Jefferson's 'Anas' and Political Gossip in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (1995).
[187] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 71.
[188] Rojas, "'Insults Unpunished'" 181.

of seeing me dejected."[189] This passage at least hints at the fact that, for the captives, their captivity was something, though unfortunate, that could be endured without a complete loss of one's personal honor.

There is little reason to doubt that Americans would initially remain hopeful to be quickly redeemed. They likely had a passing familiarity with the Barbary system of tribute and ransom and thus knew that – even though they were nominally "slaves," – this experience would differ substantially from what they knew about American chattel slavery; they could be redeemed by the efforts of their home country. One particularly interesting aspect of this section is that Cathcart expressed concern about the impression he would make on his captors who are otherwise portrayed as primitive and backward in his account.

One possible explanation for emphasizing the importance of maintaining his personal "grace" in the eyes of his captors might be the importance of setting a precedent. Cathcart mentioned that many inhabitants of Algiers were curious to see the new set of captives, because they assumed them to be Native Americans. They were "much surprised to see us so fair, or as they expressed themselves, so much like Englishmen."[190] As will be shown, Cathcart repeatedly stressed the novelty and superiority of the American political system (relative to European ones), something in which he expressed great pride. In this sense, then, Cathcart, as a representative citizen of the United States, attempted to uphold his "grace" to imprint the idea of Americans as defiant in the minds of his captors.

Cathcart took it for granted that the United States would redeem the American captives, and he based this assumption on the implementation of republican ideals after the American Revolution:

> I thought it impossible that a nation just emerged from slavery herself would abandon the men who had fought for her independence to an ignominious captivity in Barbary, when they could be immediately redeemed for less than $50,000. I was not ignorant of the embarrassments that our government labored before the adoption of the present Constitution, yet the sound policy of redeeming their citizens immediately appeared so evident that I was confirmed in my hopes, although I knew the treasury at that period was very poor, I was so sanguine as to believe the sum would be loaned immediately to the government by individuals, or that our fellow citizens would have raised it by subscription.[191]

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[189] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 13. Cathcart reiterated a very similar sentiment in his journal, writing "I am firmly resolved to wait with the fortitude be coming to a christian and an American until my captivity expires by honourable redemption." See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 319.

[190] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 11. This is yet another sentiment which Cathcart echoed elsewhere: "Americans were the sons of Englishmen whose manners and customs and mode of thinking were similar." See *Diplomatic Journal*, 331.

[191] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 27. This statement is likely slightly exaggerated; it seems unlikely that Cathcart was privy to any detailed knowledge about the state of the treasury under the Articles of Confederation. However,

While this optimism proved premature in the extreme, the quotation is telling of some general assumptions Cathcart evidently held at the time.

Firstly, there was a reliance on the idea that the rhetoric from the War of Independence would transform into actions for the captives. While the system of Barbary slavery was tacitly accepted in Europe, Cathcart assumed that the United States, by virtue of its achievements in the Revolutionary War, would not simply abandon American citizens under any circumstances. This optimism is noteworthy, because merely twenty-one Americans were held captive in Algiers at this time. Additionally, Cathcart openly speculated that the Articles of Confederation were probably ill-suited to raise funds for their redemption. Despite these circumstances, he maintained that it would be impossible for Americans to ignore the hypocrisy of American slaves in Algiers after the United States had "emerged from slavery."[192]

Next to the ornate language of overcoming slavery, Cathcart also mentioned the "sound policy" of redeeming the Americans by all means necessary; if the US government proved unable to pay the ransom, Cathcart suggested that the money could be loaned (presumably from other countries) or fellow countrymen could raise it by subscription. While this argument was doubtless also connected to revolutionary ideals, "sound policy" also hinted at the fact that Cathcart also considered the international context. Redeeming the captives was not solely intended to prove to the captured Americans that they are valued as citizens, or in Cathcart's case, rewarded for his service during the Revolutionary War. Rather, he suggested that *not* redeeming the captives (as well as negotiating a peace treaty) would lead to further international embarrassments.[193] The prevention of further captures and continuation of Mediterranean trade was therefore another factor that contributed to Cathcart's expectation of a speedy redemption.

Moreover – although he was of course first and foremost personally affected – Cathcart also expressed worries about the broader meaning of the captures in the Mediterranean, and the consequences for the United States in general. A speedy redemption must then also be

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rhetorically juxtaposing "slavery" with the American ideal of "freedom" (popularized during the Revolutionary War) was certainly not uncommon at the time. This held especially true for those, like Cathcart, who had fought for independence. For example, fellow veteran-turned-captive Richard O'Brien described the Americans in Algiers thusly: "it is impossible for us to be content whilst we are under the character of slaves, so disagreeable is confinement to the men of the Land of Liberty." See Richard O'Brien to Thomas Jefferson, June 8, 1786, *Naval Documents*¸ I:6. He reiterated this point in a separate letter, describing the Americans in Algiers as "sons of freedom at present . . . in slavery." See Richard O'Brien to William Carmichael, July 11, 1786, in Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA. Moreover, as will be discussed later, both Cathcart and O'Brien would later describe themselves as "victims of independence."

[192] In this instance, the presence of African slaves in North America appears to have escaped Cathcart's attention.

[193] This argument was once more shared by Richard O'Brien, who warned that "it is not the interest of any commercial nation that the Americans should obtain a peace with the Barbary States" and thus urged American diplomats to "use every means to obtain a peace with the Barbary States." Richard O'Brien to Thomas Jefferson, June 8, 1786, *Naval Documents*, I:2, 3.

understood as means to compensate for notions of international shame – shame exacerbated in the context of the American experience, because the United States was the only country at the time claiming to have been founded upon the values of liberty and equality.

Cathcart also heavily idealized the American citizenry. Stressing the point of fellow *citizens* (in lieu of "countrymen", "fellow creatures," or other more neutral expressions of the time.), Cathcart assumed a high level of camaraderie among the American populace.[194] It seems, he generally expected that substantial parts of the American people would share his view that the enslavement of American citizens ran counter to US independence. Hence came the expectation that the public would act in case the (at the time comparatively weak) government was incapable of doing so. Raising this possibility also emphasized the publicity of his situation, since the "public" could only act if it was informed of the captures. In the end, only one American captive was redeemed through the efforts of his family and friends, whereas the majority of those captured in 1785 only received varying degrees of attention.[195] But despite some attempts, nothing ever quite excited the public to the extent that more significant attempts were made to redeem the rest of the captives.

At the outset of his narrative, Cathcart expressed genuine faith in his country and appears to have prided himself in the knowledge that the newly founded republic would never abandon its citizens. Because of his trust in the American government, he presupposed the righteousness of his country and maintained a belief in his personal honor, even as he was enslaved. During this very brief episode of optimism, Cathcart did not consider the possibility that his country could choose not to redeem him, or worse, might be unable to do so.

The account quickly changed from expressions of initial optimism to detailed descriptions of Algiers as a place of depravity and backwardness. In these sections, Cathcart emphasized the shame related to his country's inability to redeem its citizens. His personal experience as a slave also contributed to Cathcart regarding himself as greatly diminished in making claims about his personal honor. From a narrative standpoint, these shameful episodes were subsequently rectified by Cathcart's rise to the position as "chief Christian clerk," his accumulation of wealth, and his detailed description of successfully negotiating a peace treaty between Algiers and the United States. All these latter sections aimed at (re-)establishing

[194] The term "citizen" stands out in many documents concerned with Barbary captivity, as it was frequently compared to the "subjects" of monarchies in Europe or the Barbary States. Many Americans emphasized their rights by describing themselves as *citizens* of the United States. A sense of solidarity was often implied. American diplomat David Humphreys wrote that "the deplorable conditions of those Citizens of the United States of America, who are in Captivity at Algiers ought to arouse the attention of their fellow Citizens." See David Humphreys, "A Plan for Redeeming the American Citizens now in Captivity at Algiers" in Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA. The term was also frequently used in treaties with the Barbary States.
[195] In fact, almost half of the original twenty-one captives died in Algiers.

Cathcart as an honorable person. The descriptions of Cathcart's actions may also be regarded as an attempt to elevate his country's honor next to his own. Prior to these statements, however, Cathcart outlined the dreadful situation he found himself in.

The descriptions of Algiers largely follow proto-Orientalist tropes which had spread throughout Europe at this point.[196] Whereas, Edward Said's *Orientalism* only focuses on early modern Europe[197] (specifically France and Great Britain), this does not mean that there was no literary tradition surrounding the "Orient" in the New World: "America was *heir* to a great deal of knowledge of Islam and Muslims, and to a long-standing tradition of prejudice originating from its European ancestry."[198] At this stage, it would therefore be difficult to argue for a distinctly American strain of Orientalism (which Said and others have argued mostly solidified in the twentieth century).[199]

Edward Said has argued that the "Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."[200] This also held true for Americans who experienced the Barbary Coast firsthand. Captives like Cathcart often directly contrasted their own situation in a "strange" and "barbaric" land with (often times romanticized) constructions of their supposedly "enlightened" home country.[201] For many Americans – especially in the years following the Revolutionary War – European countries were also viewed as a point of contrast, thus complicating Said's binary conception of "Orient" and "Occident."[202]

In *The Captives*, Cathcart's imagined a hierarchy of nations in which the United States, with its republican ideals, towered above all other countries, followed by regressive, if at least (somewhat) civilized European countries, and lastly there were the wholly uncivilized and backward Barbary States. (Native Americans are notably absent from this hierarchy.) As will

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[196] Edward Said defines Orientalism in three different ways: firstly, academic study of the "Orient." Secondly, Orientalism as a "style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident.'" Thirdly, Orientalism as a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." (The third definition is invoked most frequently whenever Orientalism is mentioned in contemporary scholarly accounts.) See, Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 2–3.

[197] Edward Said has since been criticized for the "almost complete disregard of American literature" in his work. See Gesa Mackenthun, "'Between Worlds': Edward Said and the Rediscovery of Empire in American Studies" in *America and the Orient*, ed. Heike Schaefer (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006), 15.

[198] Fuad Sha'ban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: The Roots of Orientalism in America* (Durham, North Carolina: Acorn Press, 1991), 27.

[199] See, Said, *Orientalism*, 4 and Brian T. Edwards, "Disorienting Captivity: A Response to Gordon M. Sayre," *Early American Literature* 45 (2010): 342.

[200] Said, *Orientalism*, 1–2.

[201] As Jacob Rama Berman has argued, "Cathcart's idealized vision of a coherent and culturally homogenous America is constantly harassed by the multicultural and multilinguistic reality of the literal landscapes he surveys." See Berman, *American Arabesque*, 33.

[202] Said himself later conceded that as a "fact of human production," this binary distinction should of course be regarded as "imagined geography," See Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique* 1 (1985): 90.

be shown, for the most part, political despotism (informed by Islam) and the backwardness of the people are identified as the root cause of (in this case) Algiers' supposed inferiority.[203]

As for Europe, its willingness to abide by Barbary customs and accept the theft of its subjects was the source of their disgrace. (Even though Europe was certainly not described as similar in their depravity when compared to depictions of the Barbary States.[204]) Following a lengthy section depicting the miserable conditions in the slave prisons, Cathcart indicted all of Europe for causing these hardships, speculating that if European nations pursued a policy of "stopping the dishonorable tribute . . . redeeming their slaves and stationing two Frigates in that sea . . . the Barbary States would become as contemptible as the little Republic of Lucca, and if we add to this the influence such a coalition would have at the Ottoman Porte[,] their total annihilation would eventually take place."[205] For many Americans, this criticism was frequently invoked when it came to the role of Europe in relation to the Barbary Coast.

North Africa's alleged depravity, on the other hand, manifested itself in a variety of ways. For example, Algerian heads of state, or "deys" (as well as Muslims in general) were frequently described in gendered language. Barbary rulers were generally excluded from the discourse of masculine honor: "Lacking Christianity and the Enlightenment, not to mention manly restraint, North Africans were viewed by Westerners as slaves to their passions who gave in to impulses for all sorts of lascivious behavior."[206] Both Richard O'Brien and William Eaton (the American consul to Tunis) observed the Barbary rulers' tendencies toward homosexuality which they described as sexually depraved.[207]

The Barbary Coast was thus perceived as a "wicked mix of political tyranny and wild sex."[208] This becomes evident, for example, when Cathcart mentioned how a captive was about to be freed and expressed his gratitude toward the dey (while kissing his hand) for never having received a bastinado (beatings to his feet). Surprised by this, the dey immediately ordered the captive to be beaten one hundred times, but after the captive protested, changed his order to two hundred beatings.[209] In his descriptions of Algiers, Cathcart included many similar accounts which emphasized arbitrary punishment being carried out at the whim of a Muslim, thus

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[203] The Orientalist tropes in *The Captives* were certainly nothing new at the time, and disparaging depictions of the "Oriental other" remained a prevalent staple in the writings of Europeans and Americans alike throughout the 19th century. In this instance, they may be regarded as exemplary for broader attitudes at the time.
[204] As will be shown, further distinctions were made among European countries. For example, France and Great Britain were usually regarded as distinct from the "smaller" countries of Europe.
[205] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 57–58.
[206] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 139.
[207] Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776–1815* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 65.
[208] Ibid., 61.
[209] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 19.

creating an image of Algiers as a place where "enlightened" approaches to punishment (the rule of law) were absent.

Antipathy toward Islam also contributed to the prejudice against the Barbary States' political system more generally. As part of the (Muslim) Ottoman Empire, these regencies were perceived as having "a repressive political system at odd with the republicanism [of] the evolving government of the United States."[210] Many Americans assumed a predisposition toward authoritarianism as an inevitable consequence of Islam which, at the time, was regarded as the antithesis of Enlightenment progress.[211] This form of particularly *religious* despotism was therefore doubly appalling to self-avowed patriots (such as Cathcart) who still celebrated the American Revolution as a triumph over tyranny and who regarded religious liberty as a positive implementation of republican principles.[212]

As a result, the people of Algiers were often described as unintelligent or at the very least uneducated. In *The Captives*, Cathcart often contrasted his own intelligence with that of his captors, for example, when mentioning that he could read and write (which he was discouraged to do).[213] He also mentions Algerians' interest in alchemy which he regarded as antiquated and thus treated "with ridicule."[214] In addition, he claimed that

> in all this Regency, was not a man, in my time, who could calculate an eclipse of the sun or moon. Their navigators merely knew how to take the sun's meridian, altitude, to work the latitude, and to prick off the ship's course on a plain chart. The master shipmaster who . . . was considered the best scholar in the Regency, could not work the longitude by Lunar observations, nor work a plain question in astronomy, either by logarithms or by drawing the figure.[215]

These and other quotes exemplify Cathcart's contempt for the supposed backwardness of his captors, while also establishing Cathcart as the opposite: intelligent and educated.

Nevertheless, a sense of shame emerged as a repeated theme in Cathcart's narrative, when he was forced to concede the de facto superiority of his Algerian captors. These episodes reflect both the loss of his personal honor, as well as those of foreign nations. For example, the acknowledgment of the dey's authority by kissing his hand was cited as a ritual in which

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[210] Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20.
[211] For a more thorough discussion on this juxtaposition, see Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 45–59.
[212] There are numerous instances of Cathcart citing the Constitution as proof of American moral superiority over both the Barbary States and the European Christian nations. In a conversation with the Dey of Algiers, for example, he argued that Muslims were free to practice their faith in the United States and could even become president, as there were no religious tests required to hold office. See Cathcart, *The Captives*, 160. For a more detailed discussion on whether a Muslim could be president, see also Denise A. Spellberg, "Could a Muslim be President? An Eighteenth-Century Constitutional Debate," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39 (2006).
[213] Cathcart reported he was called a "false priest" for his habit of reading. See Cathcart, *The Captives*, 22.
[214] Ibid., 28.
[215] Ibid., 106.

individuals are dishonored, and in the case of consuls, also the countries they represented. Cathcart, described how this "act of humiliation" was performed during a "great festival."[216] First, attending Muslims were required to kiss the dey's hand, and only then were the consuls granted the "*honor,"*[217] right before the "head clerk and then the chief of the Jew brokers."[218] The humiliation was thus exaggerated by the fact that the consuls were regarded as "infidels"[219] and grouped with the chief Christian clerk (a slave) and the Jewish money lenders who were in this case also treated as the lowest class of Barbary society.[220]

Cathcart furthermore noted distinctions among the European nations. "The British and French Consuls sensible of the indignity they would suffer by waiting on the Dey the first day of the festival always wait on him the day before, neither do they kiss his hand."[221] The French and British were thus regarded as on a different footing altogether. Rather than being acted upon, their longstanding tradition of dealing with the Barbary States allowed them to exercise a certain amount of power. The special place of France and the United Kingdom was common knowledge at the time. Due to their powerful navies, the French and the British – while still compelled to occasionally pay tribute – were given certain privileges. While many smaller and weaker European countries suffered under Barbary piracy, these two countries were often able to exercise their influence at the courts of Barbary and thus harm commercial rivals.[222]

Varying levels of influence were not only exemplified by the privilege of not having to participate in rituals of supposed humiliation. They also complicated cooperation among the "Christian" countries. Cathcart described the following, demonstrating the power the British were able to exercise in Algiers:

> By special grace we were permitted to visit our countrymen at the British Consul's garden which was about three miles from the city. and there, to our surprise, we found Captain O'Brien with a hoe digging a hole to plant a tree in the Consul's garden; Stephens, with the capote given him by the Regency tied round his middle with a straw rope, driving a mule loaded with manure for the root of the tree, and Coffin, who was consumptive, feeding the hogs and poultry.

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[216] Likely the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. See Cathcart, *The Captives*, 23, 22. Similar descriptions of kissing a dey's hand are likewise included in the original manuscript for *The Captives*. See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 310.
[217] This word was highlighted, presumably to satirize the idea of this being an "honor."
[218] Ibid., 28.
[219] This classification added a religious component to this act of humiliation as well. Not only were the consuls dishonored (as well as the countries they represented), but their Christian identity was violated as well: "The hand-kiss marked the submission of infidels to the domination of Islam." See Christian Windler, "Diplomatic History as a Field for Cultural Analysis: Muslim-Christian Relations in Tunis, 1700–1840," *The Historical Journal* 44 (2001): 95.
[220] Frevert, *Die Politik der Demütigung*, 156. For an extensive discussion on this topic (though with a focus on Tunis, not Algiers), see also Windler, "Diplomatic History as a Field for Cultural Analysis."
[221] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 23.
[222] Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 16.

> We could not refrain from tears at viewing their humiliating situation which affected us the more as they suffered this indignity from a person, (the British Consul), who ranked among Christians and gentlemen, was of the same religion and spoke the same language, and from whom a more humane treatment might naturally have been expected.[223]

Cathcart here expressed shock, because the supposedly honorable captains were reduced to working in the garden of the British consul, after having presumed they had been living there as equals. There is no record of this scene in the extant writings of Richard O'Brien to verify Cathcart's account. However, if the British consul did in fact force O'Brien to work in his garden, this might have been regarded as severely humiliating. Not documenting this occurrence would appear to be an obvious choice under these circumstances.[224]

In terms of hierarchy within Algerian slave society, this episode confirms that Richard O'Brien and Isaac Stephens (as captains) were generally thought of to be ranked higher than the rest of the captives. Their honor was ascribed and presumed a priori. Their position of leadership – in the case of O'Brien – was not questioned, and their supposed humiliation by the British consul became a scene for which crying represented an adequate reaction. Commenting on the episode, historian Robert J. Allison later rightly noted that these captains were definitely "better off than ordinary sailors."[225] However, violations of their honor became the site of shock and outrage for sailors, even if they themselves suffered in slave prisons, being subject to even harsher working conditions.

The humiliation was furthered by the fact that the perpetrator was supposed to be a "gentleman" who shared their religion, language, race, and, until recently, even nationality. There seemed to be an expectation that Mr. Logie (the British consul) would treat his "guests" in a manner more adequate to their status as captains but also more according to his own; his ranking among "gentlemen" carried with it certain assumptions as well as a certain amount of responsibility: "Gentlemen restrained their passions and controlled their words. Their manners were refined, and their carriage easy. They were men of integrity and honesty whose promises could be trusted."[226] In this sense, then, the act of humiliating the American captains also stained

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[223] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 23–24.

[224] It should further be noted that Richard O'Brien wrote elsewhere that "the British Consul, you may be assured is an inveterate enemy to the Americans." See Richard O'Brien to Thomas Jefferson, June 8, 1786, *Naval Documents*, I:2. Elsewhere, Cathcart likely referenced this episode, recalling an instance "when I went to pay you a visit at the Garden." See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 326. It seems highly unlikely that Cathcart wholly fabricated the entire episode, because O'Brien was portrayed in a manner that is distinctly positive (if pitiful). As Cathcart and O'Brien would become bitter rivals in subsequent years, there seems little to no use in portraying O'Brien in such a way after the fact. The episode has also been cited by a number of other historians. See, for example, Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 54 and Allison, *Crescent Obscured*, 113.

[225] Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 113.

[226] Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), xv.

Mr. Logie's reputation as a man of honor. He had led Americans to believe that they would be his guests but instead treated them as slaves. In the broader context of locality, Algiers thus emerged as a place in which the (American/European) code of honor was routinely violated; even those of whom honorable conduct was expected (European Christians) did not live up to these expectations.

In addition to his status as a gentleman, the consul's nationality was also important in this context. In the scene, it is also described how the British consul, as a representative of the United Kingdom, assumed authority over Americans. Symbolically, the United States was thus once more under the yoke of the tyrannical British (against whom Cathcart had personally fought in the Revolutionary War). When the first Americans were captured, the Treaty of Paris, in which the United Kingdom formally recognized American independence, had been ratified only two years prior. Rumors abounded that the British were still resentful over their defeat and were thus the true instigators of Algiers' depredations against the United States. Richard O'Brien hinted at British influence in Algiers as early as 1786, reporting to Thomas Jefferson that "the British Consuls used their influence in signifying to the Algerines the unjustness of our cause [the American Revolution]."[227] After the second round of captures in 1793, the rumor of British intrigue had become a wide-spread quasi-truth for many Americans, culminating in "paranoia, Anglophobia, and belligerence."[228]

It comes as little surprise, then, that American captives in Algiers during this time frequently described themselves as "victims of American independence," coupling rhetoric of the American Revolution with their captivity.[229] It is not entirely clear whether Cathcart or O'Brien first started using this phrase to describe their situation, but it was invoked repeatedly by both in letters and diary entries.[230] The captives were using this language "to elicit from strangers both sympathy and a sense of shared suffering."[231] Yet, this characterization – in combination with Cathcart's account of the British consul – also served to explicitly link the struggle against Great Britain to Algiers and vice versa.[232]

Providing the British with agency might have provided some sense of alleviation from the sense of shame that stemmed from America's inability to overcome an "uncivilized" enemy,

[227] Richard O'Brien to Thomas Jefferson, June 8, 1786, *Naval Documents*, I:4.
[228] Peskin, "The Lessons of Independence," 314.
[229] James Cathcart to David Humphreys, not dated, in *Diplomatic Journal*, 327. See also, Cathcart, *The Captives*, 145. For an extensive discussion on this phrase, see also Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 74–77.
[230] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 76.
[231] Ibid., 75.
[232] It seems unlikely that the British deliberately attempted to harm American trade at the time: "In 1793 and 1794 Americans simply did not have the necessary perspective to realize that the fate of a hundred or so Americans in Algiers was, at best, peripheral to England's foreign policy." See, Peskin, "The Lessons of Independence," 313.

which Richard O'Brien (echoing Cathcart's sentiment) once described as having "no idia of nationale honoure."[233] Being subjugated by Algiers directly would have intensified the notion of helplessness on the side of the United States. But blaming captures on the British might have appeared as a way to rationalize the actions of Algiers as not coming from within the supposedly backward, depraved regency, rhetorically placed outside the realm of honor. Therefore, It comes as little surprise that Cathcart remarked that "no war has been declared by those marauders [the Barbary States] . . . that has not been instigated by some of the commercial powers in opposition to their rivals in trade."[234]

Nevertheless, American diplomats and captives alike had to come to terms with the fact that their country had little to no influence in the Mediterranean. As rumors of British intrigues abounded, the American captives still had to submit to Algerian rule in their daily lives. Cathcart mostly emphasized his honorable conduct during his captivity, but he also occasionally described his situation in melancholy terms. Reflecting on the eighth anniversary of his captivity, Cathcart expressed his feelings thusly: "O! America, could you see the miserable situation of your citizens in captivity, who have shed their blood to secure you the liberty you now possess and enjoy . . . you are the first that set the example to the world, to shake off the yoke of tyranny, to expel despotism and injustice from the face of the earth."[235] Again, Cathcart conflated his own situation with that of his country. He implored the United States "to see" thus emphasizing the publicity of his situation. He expressed hope that his humiliating situation would be visible to the American public, so that he might be redeemed.

Shame was also extended to the United States which is described as having exposed its weakness internationally, after failing to liberate the world from tyranny. In this instance Cathcart may be regarded as an exemplification of "Americans [who] saw in their new nation a true hope for humanity, and recognized their responsibilities to the whole world in secular, as well as in religious, terms."[236] The shamefulness of his situation thus stood in contrast to the values of the American Revolution (in addition to a passing reference that he fought during this war). So, instead of the United States becoming the harbinger of Enlightenment principles, Cathcart's captivity exemplified how – as victims of American independence – the United States' revolutionary cause could not be fulfilled until he and his fellow countrymen were freed.

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[233] Richard O'Brien to David Humphreys, Algiers, November 21, 1794, in Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA.
[234] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 58.
[235] Ibid., 144. According to the historian Brett Goodin, this and the following passages were taken "verbatim" from original manuscripts found in the *James L. Cathcart Papers* that are stored in the Library of Congress. See Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 76.
[236] Sha'ban, *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought*, 26.

Cathcart immediately followed up the previous section with the following lamentation, one of the rare instances of white Americans comparing North African captivity to the American system of chattel slavery:

> The negroes have even had a share in your deliberations, and have reaped the benefits arising from your wise and wholesome laws and regulations, and we, the very men who have assisted in all your laudable enterprises, are now cast off because we have been unfortunate; are denied the rights of our common country. Have we sold our birth right? Are we excluded without a cause from the privileges enjoyed indiscriminately by the lowest class of our citizens?[237]

In this passage, Cathcart went all in when it comes to the description of the loss of his personal honor. By stating that even Africans and African Americans in North America enjoyed comparatively more freedoms than he did, he put himself *beneath* the position of what was likely the most dishonorable position known to him – that of an African slave.

An alternative interpretation would be that Cathcart did not invoke slaves but free men and women of African ancestry. This view is supported by Cathcart's use of the term "citizen" instead of something more neutral, such as "inhabitant." Commenting on this possibility, one scholar observed that, "neither group [black men and women] had full citizenship rights in America. Nevertheless, the Barbary milieu forces Cathcart to reimagine an America in which the social justice claims of African slaves are recognized."[238] Thus, Cathcart used race to further emphasize the misery of his situation by contrasting it to an idealized homeland. Lastly, he also greatly exaggerated his own position and stripped himself from any notion of personal honor, to garner sympathy by the reader.

This is one of the few instances where Cathcart made use of the language of sensibility. The use of such emotional prose "increasingly emphasized the victims' suffering."[239] The most likely influence for this style of writing was the genre of Indian captivity narratives which many sailors read as means of entertainment during long voyages.[240] There remains a possibility that Cathcart utilized this literary device strategically. However, the year 1793 was in many ways a turning point for the American captives. As Cathcart stated, the passage was written on the eighth anniversary of his captivity. Additionally, the plague had made an appearance in Algiers, bringing the captives "to their lowest point yet."[241] Moreover, over one hundred further Americans were captured by Algerian cruisers by the end of that year.

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[237] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 144.
[238] Berman, *American Arabesque*, 40.
[239] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 26.
[240] Ibid., 25.
[241] Ibid., 37.

Escape from captivity constitutes a central theme in *The Captives* as well as Cathcart's writing more generally. However, within this self-constructed narrative, Cathcart also told a story of overcoming the stigma of being a slave. Simultaneously to lengthy descriptions of North African depravity discussed in the previous section, Cathcart also outlined his rise through the ranks of Algerian slave society. Not unlike Benjamin Franklin's famous *Autobiography*, Cathcart chronicled in minute detail how he started with nothing and gradually became a man of influence, an achievement for which he has been labeled a "self-made slave."[242] He expressed these experiences through the language of (personal) honor. Next to his accumulation of material wealth, Cathcart also emphasized his integrity, generosity, and elevation of social status, all of which culminated in a depiction of Cathcart akin to an honorable gentleman, rather than a common sailor.

At the beginning of his captivity, Cathcart outlined the decision to make something of himself thusly:

> I finally resolved to bear the hardest labor accompanied with hunger, nakedness and all their concomitant miseries . . . I was likewise actuated by so strong a desire to change my situation in hopes of procuring information which would enable me to ameliorate it, and be the means of alleviating the sufferings of my unfortunate fellow citizens.[243]

Instead of passively accepting his fate, this quotation describes a moment of Cathcart actively deciding to defy his masters, thus reclaiming a sense of personal autonomy that was essential for maintaining one's honor.

However, the statement carries with it an altruistic connotation as well. Cathcart was not only concerned with his own redemption but also that of his "fellow citizens," suggesting a sense of selflessness.[244] Furthermore, Cathcart stated that "the honor of our country was connected with our redemption,"[245] reiterating the notion that it would be both self-evident and necessary that the United States would quickly redeem its citizens in order to maintain its honor and fulfill the principles of the American Revolution. From this perspective, Cathcart's supposed concern for the other American captives reflect an understanding of republican camaraderie.

Cathcart's expressions of concern for his countrymen can also be interpreted as serving the purpose of solidifying Cathcart's own status as an American citizen for the reader (or,

[242] Sears, *American Slaves and African Masters*, 87.
[243] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 43–44.
[244] Cathcart stressed his supposed altruism even years after his release from captivity, as will be discussed in an upcoming section.
[245] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 43.

perhaps, even himself). Nationality was an important issue for numerous reasons. It was not unusual for the crews of merchant vessels to be made up of numerous nationalities. North Africans, however, usually did not give much credence to that: "In [the] economy of captivity and ransom, a sailor's allegiance determined both whether he could be enslaved and who was responsible for redeeming him. That is, men captured aboard an American vessel were considered Americans for the purpose of enslavement and ransom."[246] For Cathcart, at least at the beginning of his captivity, the issue of his nationality was far from resolved.[247]

In December of 1785, Cathcart co-signed a petition to King George III, asking to be redeemed as a *British* subject.[248] Because of his Irish origins, he had a somewhat reasonable claim to being British, but throughout much of his extant writings, he emphasized his allegiance to the United States. The petition is never mentioned in *The Captives*, probably because it would constitute an admission of conduct that might be regarded as cowardly and treasonous in spirit. Instead, Cathcart exclusively identified as American in *The Captives*, denigrates the British, and took pride in having fought in the American Revolution. Identifying as British just to get out of captivity would have constituted highly shameful behavior within the value system Cathcart described. This omission then further points toward Cathcart having an audience in mind for his journal.[249]

His behavior can be contrasted to that of Richard O'Brien who, as late as 1794, advised David Humphreys that certain terms for peace should not be met by the United States, because "those certainly are too exorbitant. They would be very dishonourable."[250] O'Brien advised a course of action that would further delay his own redemption. Of course, O'Brien's experiences in Algiers differed considerably from those of common sailors. Nevertheless, O'Brien had nominally been a slave for almost ten years at this point, and freedom with "dishonor" was still regarded as more detrimental than prolonged captivity, both for himself and his country. What can be drawn from comparing O'Brien's behavior to that of Cathcart is that (at least publicly) freedom had to achieved *honorably* or not at all.

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[246] Perl-Rosenthal, *Citizen Sailors*, 95.
[247] Cathcart has been described as "most dexterous in slipping back and forth across national boundaries," and in a singular instance he referred to Great Britain as his home country as late as 1794. It is impossible to ascertain, however, in how far this was for strategic reasons, because at this point, Cathcart generally identified as American in most of his correspondence. See Perl-Rosenthal, *Citizen Sailors*, 97.
[248] Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 220–222.
[249] Of course, there might also have been an editorial intervention here, but in much of Cathcart's correspondence that was not published in *The Captives*, he also identified as American. In the "Letter Book," for example, he described the United States as his "adopted Patria." See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 319.
[250] Richard O'Brien to David Humphreys, Algiers, November 8, 1794, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA.

However, it is worth pointing out that the petition to George III was drafted only a few months after the first Americans had been captured. At this point, the newly arrived captives might still have experienced a sense of overwhelming anxiety (after initial optimism had dissipated), motivating them to obtain their freedom by any means necessary. These rushed attempts at redemption probably subsided quickly, and there is "no indication of a follow-up [petition]."[251] Additionally, the petition was received by Consul Charles Logie (whom Cathcart would later describe in rather unflattering terms) which probably attributed to Cathcart's subsequent distrust of the British in general. This notwithstanding, it remains remarkable that Cathcart might have been redeemed as a British subject as early as 1785. This episode showcases that his Algerian captors (as well as the British by not complying with the petition[252]) contributed to Cathcart's increasingly patriotic self-identification as distinctly American by treating him as such and by denying competing claims of nationality. These instances also further exemplify the prevailing conception at the time that freedom should only be attained honorably.

Cathcart described his rise through the ranks of Algerian slave society as a consequence of his hard work and personal integrity, resulting in him attaining the position of chief Christian clerk – the highest position for a Christian slave in Algiers. Additionally, Cathcart was able to acquire a total of three taverns during his residence in Algiers, providing him a generous income. He mentioned this repeatedly: "Intensely proud of his success and determined to appear self-sufficient, Cathcart bragged about his wealth and vociferously proclaimed his independence."[253] His wealth and status, however, was also potentially hazardous to his reputation in Algiers for a variety of reasons.

His position as chief Christian clerk once more called into question his allegiance. Only this time, the problem was Cathcart's proximity to his captors: "the Algerian networks that made his success possible were potentially dangerous in an American context. He feared that fellow slaves and countrymen might resent him working for and so closely with Algerians."[254] To counter that impression, Cathcart thus routinely emphasized that he used his position of power to help his fellow captives, for instance, by warding off some of the slave masters' extortion schemes. Another example can be found in Cathcart using his influence to transfer some of the newly arrived American captives (not coincidentally officers) to a *bagnio* that

[251] Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 220.
[252] As far as can be ascertained, the petition did arrive in London but was never answered. See Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 220.
[253] Sears, *American Slaves and African Masters*, 103.
[254] Ibid., 79.

provided more comfortable lodging.[255] Thus, "Cathcart carefully presented his employment to avoid the appearance of Algerian complicity or individualistic pursuit of personal comfort."[256]

Another matter that required justification for Cathcart was his material wealth. As the proprietor of three taverns, Cathcart stated that he had "profit sufficient for all my purposes."[257] However, Cathcart usually qualified such statements by stressing that he used excess funds for the good of his fellow captives. Evidently immensely proud of his affluence, Cathcart still justified his riches by statements such as the following:

> I believe those who survive will do me the justice to acknowledge, that they never wanted a good meal while I had it in my power to give it to them; that they were attended in the hospital when sick, and that those who died were buried in a decent coffin at my expense. Nay, never was any American buried without my attending them to the grave, reading prayers over them, and remaining until they were decently covered.[258]

By stressing his supposed altruism, Cathcart preemptively evaded the accusation of selfishness.

But his riches allowed Cathcart to pursue another objective as well: elevating his social position among the (captive) American officers. Cathcart's balance sheets testify for this. As historian Christine E. Sears has noted: "Doubtless his countrymen appreciated his help, but perhaps they noticed that Cathcart spent the bulk of his economic support on officers rather than on the seamen he so piteously portrayed in his letters and journal."[259] As such, his altruistic spending was not only a sign of his generosity but appears to have served specific purposes as well. Toward the end of the narrative, Cathcart is portrayed as the equal of the higher-ranking American captives and even diplomats.

There is some indication that Cathcart was at least partially successful in his ambitions. This is evident, for example, in a letter written by Cathcart to O'Brien. In early 1793, the plague had broken out in Algiers and Cathcart wrote to O'Brien, stating that he did not know whether he was infected and thus "on the verge of eternity," as he described it. Emphasizing the "friendship that has subsisted between us during the trying time of our captivity," he asked O'Brien to inform his friends in case of his death, emphasizing that it "possibly may be the last favor I ever will demand of you."[260] Presenting O'Brien with such an important task points to the fact that Cathcart understood himself to be on friendly terms with O'Brien.

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[255] Ibid., 80.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 138.
[258] Ibid., 136. Richard O'Brien confirmed this by sending Cathcart note in which he expressed gratitude for attending to the "Remains of our two Deceased Brothers." Quoted in Sears, *American Slaves and African Masters*, 81.
[259] Sears, *American Slaves and African Masters*, 100.
[260] Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 320.

However, Cathcart also hinted at a dispute with the other captain, Isaac Stephens, in that same letter, writing the following: "I forgive Stephens from my heart, but if I die of this distemper, he certainly will have his conduct to answer for, relative to me, before a just God who makes no difference between the captains and the sailors."[261] Stephens had prevented Cathcart from taking residence in the country house inhabited by the captains during the outbreak of the plague. Within the city, Cathcart was at much greater risk of contracting the disease, as is evident by the letter. This passage then verifies that Cathcart wished to be invited into the more exclusive community of higher-ranking officers.[262] Indeed, the entire letter may just have been an attempt by Cathcart to come to terms with Stephens through the mediation of O'Brien.

While these occasions demonstrate that Cathcart had difficulty joining the American "slave elite," there are at least a few verifiable instances of his friendship with Captain Richard O'Brien. After the Algerian-Portuguese truce was negotiated in 1793 – which meant the Portuguese would cease to patrol the Straits of Gibraltar – Algerian cruisers were roaming the Atlantic and captured over one hundred American sailors. As mentioned, after eight years of captivity and with the new round of captures, the old league of American captives began to become increasingly desperate for the American government to act, and captain O'Brien took it upon himself to facilitate negotiations. He did so by writing a fictitious letter under the name of "Cumingham & Nisbitt" and addressed it to himself. The letter included a number of falsehoods, including that the United States had begun to build over fifty frigates. He also added flattering remarks about the Dey of Algiers and pointed out that the United States was allied with the British, stating "the English say let us be friends & we shall govern the world. your Enemies shall be mine & your friends mine."[263] In sum, the letter was designed to both intimidate and entice the dey in order to enable serious negotiations. He then asked Cathcart to read the letter to the dey.

O'Brien's request does confirm that Cathcart had influence at the court of Algiers at the time, whereas he did not. A further instance attesting to this, as well as that Cathcart earned the respect of O'Brien, can be found in a letter written to David Humphreys who was formally in charge of negotiations with Algiers:

> Indeed I must acknowledge and be it known unto you Honoured Sir that James Leander Cathcart has during his long Captivity communicated to the Dey &

[261] Ibid.
[262] Sears, *American Slaves and African Masters*, 83. For more details on the conflict between Stephens and Cathcart, see also Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 35–37.
[263] Cumingham & Nisbitt to Richard O'Brien, June 18, 1794, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA.

> other members of the Regency very important affairs in behalf of the US and in fact on this Occasion he merits the sincere thanks of all Patriotic Americans – Cathcart has sprung from a good family he is an [illegible] & has dureing the time of our allowance being stopt, aided and assisted many of his brother sufferers – God I hope will reward him.[264]

This letter indicates that O'Brien showed some respect for Cathcart, even if it is still him, the captain, who was in the position to give this recommendation to Humphreys.

Given his exclusive access to the dey as chief Christian clerk, Cathcart at one point even assumed a role of equality, even superiority over O'Brien. In his response to O'Brien's request to read out the fictitious letter to the dey, he wrote to him that he complied "but not in the manner you dictated by bringing the whole letter to him at once but by paragraphs as opportunity permitted . . . had I brought the whole letter to him he would certainly have seen through so slight a device."[265] What would previously have been in effect an order by a superior officer, Cathcart now regarded as a suggestion subject to his own interpretation and even mild criticism.

There are other instances in which Cathcart described himself as being equal to or above O'Brien within Algerian society. He stated, for example, that he was able to visit Mr. Logie's house (the British Consul), after O'Brien had been living there for "considerable time," and was able to provide O'Brien with luxuries such as food and wine from his tavern. In fact, Cathcart boasted that he was able to improve O'Brien's working conditions in those rare instances in which he was forced to work by bribing his superiors with similar items.[266] Lodging, funds, and access to luxury items, as well as being able to get an audience with the dey are described as aspects of captivity that could improve one's station in Algiers, and Cathcart emphasized throughout his account that he was able to provide these for himself through his hard work.

Within these passages, Cathcart carefully crafted an image of himself as a man of action. Defying his nominal status as a slave, situations are emphasized during which he possessed some form of agency while downplaying those where he was being acted upon. This only seems congruent with the maintenance of personal honor which required "a sense of self-mastery and independence. Shame implies an inability to exercise will and power, a failure that involves

[264] Richard O'Brien to David Humphreys, not dated, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA.
[265] James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, November 1, 1794, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA.
[266] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 137–138. Cathcart referred to these services (as well as O'Brien's alleged lack of gratitude) in later letters to William Eaton that will be discussed later.

deep opprobrium."[267] Cathcart's actions thus stand in contrast to the image of the Barbary Coast as a place of shameful submission. To restore and then maintain his honor, Cathcart explained how he had to navigate situations that challenged certain aspects of his identity, such as his nationality. Even when Cathcart obtained wealth and influence, he was confronted with the problem of allegiance and (potentially) accusations of selfishness. The detailed descriptions of these situations can therefore be interpreted as Cathcart attempting to showcase his honorable conduct in front of an imagined audience.

Cathcart could have reverted to traditional tropes of sentimental slave narratives by emphasizing passivity in an attempt to garner sympathy. Instead, Cathcart rather explicitly did not seek the pity of the reader. His dispute with captain Isaac Stephens is indicative of the fact that Cathcart was not always successful in his endeavors, but by the of his narrative, he had reached a position where he could claim a rank equal or even superior to that of O'Brien. There are letters indicating that O'Brien and Cathcart did in fact work together in coordinating negotiations with American diplomats to bring about their release. As will be shown, Cathcart's account of these negotiations likewise emphasized his own agency while downplaying those of others.

**Overcoming Captivity: Cathcart and the 1795 Peace Treaty**

After the first Americans were captured in 1785, there was one attempt to bring about their release. John Lamb was sent to Algiers but was ultimately ill-equipped to make any progress in redeeming the Americans or negotiating a peace treaty for the United States. Lamb had neither sufficient funds, nor is he described as a skilled diplomat.[268] Richard O'Brien stated that he hoped "never to see him in Algiers on any business for the United States except to chuse mules and Barbary horses."[269] After Lamb left Algiers, negotiations were not resumed until over 100 more Americans were captured in 1793, giving the Algerian crisis a new sense of urgency.

Ultimately, a treaty was negotiated with the combined efforts of Richard O'Brien, James Cathcart, as well as emissaries Joseph Donaldson, David Humphreys, and Joel Barlow.[270] Cathcart's writings provide a unique perspective in which he described himself as the driving

[267] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s–1890s* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 35.
[268] For the diplomatic history of the Lamb mission, see Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 48–65.
[269] Richard O'Brien to William Carmichael, July 11, 1786, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA.
[270] Although it should be noted that both Humphreys and Barlow were mostly responsible for saving the treaty, after it had already been negotiated.

force behind the successful negotiations. Both in *The Captives* and his *Diplomatic Journal*, the accounts of the events surrounding the negotiations take up vast proportions of the entire documents, testifying for the importance placed on these occurrences for Cathcart. The descriptions are extremely detailed, and Cathcart is portrayed in a most favorable light relative to others, particularly Donaldson and O'Brien. Cathcart's comments then served to present him as among equals during the negotiations.

Cathcart provided one example for his elevated position in the description of how he met with emissary Joseph Donaldson who was still on a ship in the bay of Algiers. While on his way, to greet Donaldson, he reported: "I was met by Captain O'Brien . . . who wished to go on board with me; the former was stopped as no slave except the Dey's chief clerk [Cathcart himself] is allowed to go out of the mole, but upon my becoming responsible for his return he was permitted to go with me."[271] Cathcart established his position of power and influence from the very start of the negotiations, and O'Brien served as a point of contrast, despite his rank. It was O'Brien who had to seek permission, whereas Cathcart was allowed to see Donaldson by default.

But Cathcart did not stop there. He then went on to describe Joseph Donaldson's appearance in detail as well:

> Joseph Donaldson, Jr. Esq., was a man upwards of 50 years old, of a forbidding countenance and remarkably surly. His disposition was more soured by a fit of the gout and the roughness of the pavement, besides the length of the walk was sufficient to have tired the patience of a man in good health, followed as we were by a crowd of people to see what sort of an animal the American Ambassador was, and Donaldson had an unconquerable antipathy to be stared at . . . His ludicrous appearance, joined to the contortions of his countenance, and the contortions of the Moors who are fond of giving nick-names to all that have any defects, excited my risible faculties so much, that it was with the greatest exertion that I confined them within the borders of common decency.[272]

There appears very little use in so extensive a description of the supposed ridiculousness of Donaldson's appearance other than to establish from the very beginning that it was not Donaldson who was responsible for the successful negotiation of the treaty. The description of Donaldson also shows that Cathcart thought of himself as permitted to mock the person sent to redeem him and the other American captives. Clearly, Cathcart now no longer regarded himself

[271] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 169.
[272] Ibid., 169–170. This description of Donaldson was likely somewhat exaggerated. However, Cathcart did note that the emissary suffered from gout in his journal. See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 358.

as simply a slave, but rather as one of the lead negotiators and in some sense regarded Donaldson as his inferior.[273]

Subsequently, Cathcart described how he managed to act as messenger between the dey and Donaldson. After saying he went back and forth, haggling, he ultimately credited himself for bringing down the price for peace and redemption significantly, all the while fighting off an intrigue by a French consul who had convinced the dey that Donaldson had "carte blanche," i.e. unlimited funds.[274] Cathcart described Donaldson as inept throughout the short period until the agreement was reached: "Thus peace was proclaimed . . . to the astonishment of every person in Algiers . . . by a lame old man who understood no language but his own."[275] The treaty, however, still had to be brought to David Humphreys for final confirmation.[276]

During this time, Cathcart also exhibited increased confidence in his dealings with Richard O'Brien. After the negotiations ended successfully, O'Brien asked Cathcart to get the dey's permission for him (O'Brien) to deliver the treaty to David Humphreys in Lisbon for final approval. This, Cathcart comments at length with the following:

> This request, I must confess, tried my fortitude as much as any thing I had ever experienced; for I was tired of the humiliating situation I had been so long in, and actually had intended to be the bearer of the treaty myself . . . Capt. O'Brien understanding the cause of my embarrassment, interested my patriotism and pride in his favor. He said that the situation I was in gave me an opportunity of rendering very essential service to my country . . . that by my resigning my post some person might be appointed who would be an enemy to our interests; and if any unfavorable event took place that as a patriotic citizen I would incur great censure; besides the Dey had promised me to use his influence with the Regency of Tunis in our favor, which probably he would not do was I to go away; that the sacrifice which was demanded of me would ever redound to my honor; and both O'Brien and Skjoldebrand [the Swedish consul] declared that they would represent my conduct to Col. Humphreys and to our executive, in such a manner as would not fail to receive their thanks and approbation. Therefore, considering the duty I owed my country and the friendship that had existed between O'Brien and myself during a ten years captivity, I consented but I must own with some reluctance.[277]

[273] The passage under discussion was certainly no exception to Cathcart's espoused view of Donaldson. Cathcart made numerous disparaging comments about Donaldson at the time, even alleging that "had Colonel Humphreys searched the whole United States for a more incapable person to transact public business he could not have found one." Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 354.
[274] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 202. See also, Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 352.
[275] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 188. On Donaldson's supposed lack of knowledge about foreign languages, see also Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 362.
[276] Joseph Donaldson was an emissary sent by Humphreys who had been officially charged with negotiating the peace treaty and who had to approve the treaty before it could be sent to the United States.
[277] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 188–189.

Whoever was charged with bringing the treaty to Humphreys would of course be the first person freed of his status as slave and was instead charged with a diplomatic mission. After over ten years of captivity – even if the experience was comparatively mild when contrasted to other sailors – this must have been a very tempting prospect.

Also, the two agreed that whoever would end up delivering the treaty to the person in charge of negotiations would attain a highly honorable position, and Cathcart clearly considered himself as most deserving of this prestigious mission. This appears plausible when considering that he described himself as the one responsible for the successful negotiations, something that O'Brien did not even dispute. The fact that O'Brien could not simply invoke his rank as captain but instead presented a series of arguments also shows that the two were equal in Cathcart's estimation. In this account, O'Brien exploited Cathcart's sense of patriotism. Ultimately, Cathcart described himself as making an enormous sacrifice by remaining in Algiers.

Moreover, O'Brien promised to recommend Cathcart to both Humphreys, their immediate superior, and the "executive," presumably the president. This implied that O'Brien was still in the position to do so. Thus, Cathcart still acknowledged that his position was of little value outside of Algiers. By merit of being a captain, O'Brien was still able to influence Cathcart's reputation. Indeed, as the unofficial spokesperson for the captives, he had at that point already written such recommendations, as quoted previously. Cathcart tacitly acknowledged that he was still not in the position to do the same for O'Brien. His influence was limited to Algiers and bringing the treaty to Humphreys was regarded as a rare opportunity to make a name for himself in diplomatic circles.

Clearly unhappy with O'Brien's request, Cathcart reported to nevertheless have asked the dey's permission for O'Brien.[278] Once more boasting of his influence, he stated that the dey granted "permission at once," but rather than telling O'Brien right away, he went on to say "I left O'Brien in suspense for some time as a punishment for his want of confidence and duplicity."[279] Evidently insulted by O'Brien's request, Cathcart described his behavior as increasingly malicious though not outright hostile. Prior to O'Brien's departure, Cathcart also arranged for him to receive an audience with the dey. Again, Cathcart did not refrain from pointing out his influence: "this is the first time that he had been in the palace since the day he landed, and the first time he ever spoke to the Dey . . . he kissed the Dey's hand and feet (I did

[278] Cathcart latter referred to this event as O'Brien's "political birthday." See James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, William Eaton Papers, Box 2, letters August 4, 1799 – June 20, 1800, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Hereafter cited as HL.
[279] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 191.

not like that humiliation)."[280] Prior to O'Brien's departure, Cathcart also provided him with money, "some decent clothing and a packet for Col. Humphreys."[281] This once more implied that O'Brien did not have sufficient funds to go on the voyage without Cathcart's help.

After the negotiations had been successfully concluded, there was a brief interval of relative tranquility, as the captives could expect to be redeemed in the upcoming months. However, as time went on, the Dey of Algiers became increasingly impatient and distrustful of the Americans' willingness to pay the stipulated sums. Cathcart reported there were threats to have him decapitated and Donaldson expelled.[282] During this time, when the peace treaty appeared to have been on uncertain grounds, Joel Barlow came to Algiers to pacify the situation with presents. Later, he promised that the United States would build a frigate for the dey.

Barlow's reputation superseded that of virtually all others involved in Barbary diplomacy at the time. His peer group were the likes of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, and the Marquis de Lafayette, among others. Additionally, Barlow had been a successful businessman and was part of the so-called Connecticut Wits, a Federalist literary circle.[283] The arrival of such an esteemed individual must have signaled to the Americans that the US government finally took the plight of the captives more seriously, after years of neglect.

Cathcart referred to Barlow as his "worthy friend" and described himself as his equal.[284] While refraining from personal attacks against Barlow, he clearly emphasized that Barlow only arrived after the bulk of the work had been done: "he arrived . . . precisely six months after our treaty had been signed with Algiers . . . yet by a most unjust partiality, all the services which I had rendered before . . . have been erroneously attributed to him by those who have been appointed by the people to dispense the public gratitude, but without cause."[285] It would remain a persistent theme in Cathcart's correspondence that he evidently felt that he had not been sufficiently recognized in his role as de facto diplomat during the negotiation of the treaty.

But unlike his description of O'Brien's character, he did not blame Barlow for this directly. Given the latter's reputation, he rather attempted to portray Barlow as his friend. In one anecdote, for example, Cathcart first described how he was struck in the face by the dey who was in a fit of rage, because the ransom money had not yet arrived. He then concluded with the following:

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[280] Ibid., 193.
[281] Ibid., 184.
[282] Ibid., 242.
[283] Milton Cantor, "A Connecticut Yankee in a Barbary Court: Joel Barlow's Algerian Letters to His Wife," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 19 (1962): 86.
[284] Cathcart, *The Captives*, 103.
[285] Ibid., 218.

> Mr. Donaldson laughed and said it was what he expected and that if he smote me on the left cheek, I ought to have "turned him the right also" and fulfilled the Scriptures. But he took good care not to run the risk of being smitten himself and his pleasantry was very illtimed, as the consequences resulting therefrom were of too serious a nature to make a joke of, besides wounding my feelings at such a crisis argued great want of sense and propriety on his part. Mr. Barlow seemed to regret the indignity I had suffered and said it was no dishonor to be insulted either by a fool or a despot; that those who offered the injury were the persons disgraced and not those who were injured.[286]

The image presented here is one in which Donaldson embarrassed himself in a situation during which Barlow and Cathcart see eye to eye.[287]

Cathcart's account of the conflict begins with his admission that he was under the assumption that both Donaldson and Cathcart were social equals in Barlow's eyes, as was evident from the fact that Cathcart felt himself dishonored by Donaldson's remarks. However, it was Barlow who acted as an arbiter in the situation, reassuring Cathcart that it was in fact Donaldson who had made a fool of himself. Consequently, Cathcart may be regarded as the victor in this brief conflict. Judging from Barlow's correspondence at the time, however, it seems unlikely that such opinions persevered. Barlow praised Donaldson in a letter to the secretary of state but did not express much sympathy for Cathcart.[288]

Later, Cathcart prided himself with being sent on a mission to the United States with a letter for the president and dispatches for the State Department. Once more stressing his autonomy, Cathcart emphasized that he chartered the vessel (aptly named *Independent*) himself to his considerable expense and that it was "mann'd with . . . seven Moors."[289] Cathcart thus both literally and symbolically restored his authority over people who had subjugated him for the past decade.[290] Of course, by being charged with this diplomatic mission, the voyage to the United States also brought about his freedom.

The various letters Cathcart was entrusted to carry are also listed in his journal. Their inclusion no doubt intended to emphasize the importance of his mission (transmitting official correspondence between two heads of state). However, in these letters Barlow also recommended Cathcart to David Humphreys, stating that he would "render essential service in

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[286] Ibid., 253. An abridged version of Cathcart being slapped is also provided in journal. See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 388.

[287] Elsewhere, Cathcart described the distinction between the two as follows: "the agreeable contrast between Mr. Barlow and Mr. Donaldson makes us pass our time with as much pleasure as people in our disagreable situation is susceptible of. Mr. Donaldson took the greatest pains to make himself disagreable to every person. Mr. Barlow is respected by every one that has the honour of his acquaintance. See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 392.

[288] Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 109.

[289] Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 400.

[290] While commentators at the time sometimes distinguished between "Moors," and Turks" and other ethnic groups inhabiting the Barbary coast, these terms were also often used interchangeably.

that business. He has been very useful to our cause here and on that account I beg leave to recommend him to your protection and confidence."[291] In a second letter to the secretary of state, Barlow praised his "intelligence and zeal," stating that he might be "usefully employed."[292] From what can be discerned, these were the letters Cathcart could access during his voyage, and he proudly included them in his account of events.

It may then appear that Cathcart had his rank recognized by his peers. As far as can be reconstructed, however, this was not necessarily the case. In separate letters to the secretary of state (written at almost the exact same time), Barlow did not recommend Cathcart in any capacity whatsoever: "I am told that Mr. Cathcart has hopes of obtaining the consulate to this place. He has neither the talents nor the dignity of character necessary for the purpose."[293] Clearly, Barlow did not view Cathcart as a "worthy friend." Instead, the urgency of resolving the crisis in Algiers alongside Cathcart's position of influence compelled diplomats to work with him. Privately, however, they do not appear to have harbored much respect for him. Ultimately, Barlow held Richard O'Brien in much higher esteem, stating in his recommendation that "He has a singular talent in what is called Algerine management."[294] Barlow's word proved consequential, as Richard O'Brien was indeed selected to become consul for the regency of Algiers.

Regarding Cathcart, on the other hand, Barlow even had him pay for his voyage himself. Cathcart boastfully mentioned this several times, emphasizing the sacrifice he had made.[295] Barlow later wrote that he told Cathcart he could not have the United States pay for his mission to America.[296] Barlow wrote to the secretary of state that he had chosen Cathcart to be sent to the US only because of his influence at the court of Algiers and not because he respected him personally. He went on to say that the dey would look forward to seeing Cathcart return and hopefully disregard the delay of the treaty money. In that letter, he boasted that all of this was done at no expense to the government.[297] It also remains a possibility that Barlow simply wanted to do away with Cathcart, because of his close ties to the Algerian government.

The negotiations with the Dey of Algiers, the subsequent occurrences surrounding the treaty's approval by Humphreys, and Joel Barlow's treatment of Cathcart all constituted early

[291] Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 402.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, May 4, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:155.
[294] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, October 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[295] On his expenses, he commented "Every Candid person will allow that these terms are very hard upon me, considering the lowness of my Finances." See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 404.
[296] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, May 4, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:154.
[297] Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 115.

examples of Cathcart making claims about his personal honor which largely went unrecognized by his peers.[298] As has been remarked by one scholar, O'Brien and Cathcart technically had very similar backgrounds: "both were merchant sailors prior to and after the Revolution; both served in national or state navies during the Revolution; both received modest formal education; one was born in Ireland while the other spent his youth there."[299] Given Cathcart's involvement in the negotiations as well as his position as chief Christian clerk (a position that indicated he was viewed favorably by the dey), Cathcart might arguably have appeared to be an obvious choice for the position of consul to Algiers. And yet, these achievements did little to elevate his standing beyond Algiers.

There are numerous reasons for this. For one, Richard O'Brien, both older and a captain, was apparently more successful in presenting himself as a spokesman for the captives as well as a skilled diplomat. Whereas Cathcart had focused on maximizing his influence in Algiers, O'Brien had communicated with Americans in charge of Barbary relations.[300] This appears to have given him the advantage over Cathcart. Moreover, Cathcart may have been assumed to have shifting loyalties during his time in Algiers, as his role as chief Christian clerk may have prompted outsiders to think that he was too closely aligned with the Algerians. Next to any subjective impressions both Cathcart and O'Brien made in personal encounters, these seem to have been the primary factors effecting the disparate treatment the two captives received.[301] Under the circumstances, it may appear that O'Brien was more likely to be *ascribed* honor given his age and rank. Cathcart, on the other hand, made claims about his *acquired* honor which, however, went unrecognized for the most part.

This lack of recognition may have been a motivation to compile his manuscripts and begin writing (with a likely intent to publish) *The Captives*. For Cathcart, the pursuit of personal honor had heretofore served multiple purposes. Attaining the position of chief Christian clerk and the acquisition of taverns had doubtless provided him with influence and wealth. Because wealth and influence could also materially improve Cathcart's living conditions, it may be less obvious whether Cathcart pursued his career in want of honor, or whether he simply wished to

[298] Though Cathcart was most likely unaware of Barlow's dismissing comments at the time.
[299] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 47.
[300] These letter-writing campaigns by O'Brien throughout his captivity likely resulted in his name being known among American officials, advancing his reputation. Thomas Jefferson, never having met O'Brien, still described him as a "very sensible man, and to whom we are indebted for very minute information." See Thomas Jefferson, "Report of the Secretary of State to Congress of the United States," December 30, 1790, *Naval Documents*, I:24.
[301] And it should be noted that most of the communications during their decade of captivity was done by letter, not in person.

make his captivity more durable.[302] But Cathcart also used these perks to become involved in diplomatic negotiations, and he repeatedly described how he attempted (and sometimes succeeded) to be accepted into the ranks of distinguished and reputable persons such as O'Brien, Stephens, and Barlow. The advancement of his personal honor was thus put front and center in Cathcart's writings. This becomes evident in the lengthy descriptions in which he takes credit for negotiating the peace treaty. In this context, wealth and influence – even his own redemption – were often presented as subservient to maintaining personal honor.

[302] According to Laurie M. Johnson's conceptualization of "Capitalistic honor," Cathcart's wealth could in itself also be viewed as honorable. See Laurie M. Johnson, *Honor in America? Tocqueville on American Enlightenment* (New York & London: Lexington Books, 2017), 28–33.

# Part II: Diplomacy

## The Beginnings of the US Consular Service

Between the years 1796 and 1800, the United States established a more competent diplomatic network in the Mediterranean.[1] After the American captives were freed, the focus of US foreign policy shifted toward the establishment of diplomatic relations with the remaining Barbary States, namely Tunis and Tripoli. Once peace treaties had been negotiated, consuls were appointed to all of these regencies. They were instructed to fend off further demands for tribute and ensure the undisturbed continuation of Mediterranean commerce. Peaceful relations were maintained until the Bashaw of Tripoli declared war on the United States on May 14, 1801.

While the situation in the Mediterranean seemed comparatively tranquil, US relations with France began to exacerbate. In 1793, George Washington had famously proclaimed American neutrality, after the French Revolution had resulted in open warfare between France and Great Britain. While dubious in its legality, this "milestone of foreign policy" ensured that the United States would stay out of European affairs for a time.[2] Still, American merchant vessels became the subject of inspection, detention, and even seizure by French warships in the years that followed.[3] In 1798, after it became public knowledge that an American envoy in France was confronted with demands for bribes in exchange for diplomatic negotiations, anti-French sentiment swept the United States. Under the newly elected Federalist administration of John Adams, tensions escalated, and the United States fought an undeclared naval war with France. Commonly referred to as the "Quasi-War," this conflicted lasted from 1798 until 1800 and resulted in the first deployment of the American navy.

Against the backdrop of these events, the diplomatic relations with the Barbary States did not receive much public attention. After all, peaceful relations had been established at this point. Moreover, the Adams administration was not particularly responsive to the concerns of American consuls in the Mediterranean, and it has been argued that the neglect of Barbary affairs resulted in the war with Tripoli.[4] However, this does not mean that the time period

[1] During the first 10 years after the Constitution had been adopted, 20 out of 70 consular posts were either directly in the Mediterranean or on the way thereto. See, Charles Stuart Kennedy, *The American Consul: A History of the United States Consular Service, 1776–1914* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 20.
[2] Ron Chernov, *Washington: A Life* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010), 691.
[3] Some scholars have alleged that France's actions primarily constituted retaliation for the Jay Treaty. See, for example, Howard P. Nash, *The Forgotten Wars: The Role of the U.S. Navy in the Quasi War with France and the Barbary Wars, 1798–1805* (South Brunswick & New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1968), 41.
[4] See, Michael Kitzen, "Money Bags or Cannon Balls: The Origins of the Tripolitan War, 1795–1801," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (1996).

between the release of the American captives and the Tripolitan War should be wholly discounted, especially in consideration of past scholarship:

> Captivity historiography has routinely projected the Mediterranean as a space of confrontation between the Cross and the Crescent, dark flags hoisted on heavily armed corsair galleys, naval warfare, and the enslavement of white crews and passengers. Europe and North Africa are often invoked as two worlds separated by impenetrable borders of radical ethnic, cultural, religious, and ideological differences.[5]

An analysis of the duration of relatively peaceful relations between the US and the Barbary States, therefore, emphasizes that US diplomatic relations with these regencies were not invariably dominated by conflict. Historian Robert J. Allison has made an important observation in this context: "to overlook these years is to misread history. If we ignore the years of peace between the United States and the Barbary states, we might infer that war was the natural state between the two worlds."[6]

In addition, the actions of the three consuls laid the groundwork for future conflicts, both with the Barbary States, but also on a personal level, among the Americans themselves. In this chapter, the role of both personal and national honor during this time period will be analyzed. For this purpose, the instructions of the consuls will first be discussed. Building on this, the resulting interpersonal conflicts between the newly appointed diplomats will be addressed. The main emphasis, however, will lie on the diplomatic achievements as well as challenges of the three consuls between the years 1798 and 1800. In this context, each of the three consuls will serve as a case study with a distinct focus. Richard O'Brien's tenure in Algiers will be presented as illustrative of the perspective of a "gentleman" whose honor claims went largely unchallenged. The correspondence of William Eaton, on the other hand, will serve as an early example of the prevalence of rhetoric surrounding national honor among the American consuls. Thirdly, Cathcart's writings testify to the fact that even after his release and subsequent appointment as consul to Tripoli, the young diplomat was ultimately unable to receive recognition for his allegedly honorable conduct which resulted in increasingly violet rhetoric. Lastly, an incident involving the US frigate *George Washington* will be given special consideration, as having provided the groundwork for the ensuing escalation of tensions between the United States and Tripoli.

[5] Khalid Bekkaoui, "Piracy, diplomacy, and cultural circulations in the Mediterranean" in *Piracy and Captivity in the Mediterranean, 1550–1810,* ed. Mario Klarer (London & New York, Routledge, 2019), 186.
[6] Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776–1815* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 153.

The consular service of the United States during its initial years was far from a prestigious institution. Maritime historian Mathew Taylor Raffety has described it as a "backwater, a patronage plum used to reward unimportant supporters who were lured by the possibility of wealth, prestige, influence, or commercial opportunities."[7] The work of consuls differed significantly from the work of American ministers (and later ambassadors) who were generally held in much higher esteem.[8] A consul's responsibility lied primarily in judicial duties and is described as mundane work, concerned mostly with frivolous maritime disputes.[9] As a rule, the State Department did not pay much attention to these posts. In fact, merely half of the 70 consular posts established in the first ten years after the ratification of the Constitution were even staffed by American citizens.[10] Many of these posts were simply filled with local businessmen who then also managed the affairs of the United States on the side.[11]

The situation was somewhat different on the North African coast. American commerce had been growing steadily during the early years of the republic, and exports quadrupled between 1790 and 1800, amounting to a total value of $81 million.[12] In 1799, eighty ships reportedly entered the Mediterranean by passing eastward through the Straits of Gibraltar.[13] Therefore, the State Department made it a priority that the consuls in the Barbary States would preoccupy themselves with protecting American commerce in lieu of engaging in personal business ventures. As a result, Congress ensured that the consulships in Tunis, Algiers, and Tripoli were staffed exclusively by American citizens who also received a salary.[14] They were unique positions in this respect.[15] The fact that the United States provided remuneration for these consulships indicates their importance when compared to other countries.

Following the release of the American captives in 1796, consuls were appointed to Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. Former captive James Cathcart was sent to the regency of Tripoli, generally considered to be the weakest and therefore least consequential of the Barbary States. Cathcart had been inquisitive about the possibility to work for the government almost

[7] Matthew Taylor Raffety, *The Republic Afloat: Law, Honor, and Citizenship in Maritime America* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 153.
[8] Kennedy, *The American Consul*, 22.
[9] Raffety, *The Republic Afloat*, 153.
[10] Kennedy, *The American Consul*, 20.
[11] In fact, even Barbary consuls occasionally had business dealings. For a thorough study on this subject, see Brett Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire: Three Barbary Captives and American Nation-Building, 1770–1840," (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2016).
[12] Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 12.
[13] Alfred James Field, *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776–1882* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969),40.
[14] Kennedy, *The American Consul*, 22.
[15] Peter D. Eicher, *Raising the Flag: America's First Envoys in Faraway Lands* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2018), 48.

immediately after the American captives had been redeemed,[16] and a letter by Joel Barlow indicates that he specifically wished to be appointed consul to Algiers.[17] This seems credible, given the fact that he had served there as chief Christian clerk and at one point owned three taverns in Algiers. However, it appears that Barlow's comments about Cathcart's supposed lack of character for that position carried some weight.[18] Nevertheless, Cathcart was one of the very few individuals who had any direct experience with Barbary affairs at all. His appointment can therefore be interpreted either as evidence for the desperation of the State Department to find qualified personnel or as an expression of trust in Cathcart's abilities because of his experience.

For the regency of Tunis, William Eaton was appointed. Born in 1764, Eaton had fought in the American Revolution at a young age. Later, he graduated from Dartmouth College and became a career soldier in New England. He received firsthand military experience during an expedition against Native Americans in the Ohio territory in the 1790s. Prone to personal conflicts, Eaton was once court-martialed over a dispute with a superior officer. The details of how Eaton was ultimately selected as a candidate for the position of consul are unclear, but it has been suggested that Eaton was only given the opportunity because of his personal relationship with Secretary of State Timothy Pickering.[19] Unlike the other consuls, he had no prior experience with the Barbary States. Given his status as a former professional soldier with no formal or informal diplomatic training, it seems unsurprising that Eaton would later prioritize the idea of national honor in his correspondence.

Lastly, former captive Richard O'Brien was appointed consul to Algiers. Because the details surrounding O'Brien's appointment essentially set the stage for the falling out with James Cathcart, they warrant a more thorough exploration. Like Cathcart, O'Brien was one of the Americans captured in 1785. In September of 1795, after Joseph Donaldson was successful in negotiating a peace settlement, O'Brien was the chosen emissary to deliver the Algerian peace treaty to David Humphreys for approval. As American Minister to Portugal, Humphreys had officially been charged with overseeing negotiations with the Barbary States. O'Brien was thus the first American captive to be freed and immediately obtained the opportunity to go on a diplomatic mission. After O'Brien arrived in Lisbon in late 1795, he went on to sail to London

[16] James Cathcart to David Humphreys, September 7, 1795 in Dudley W. Knox ed., *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with The Barbary Powers*, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), I:119. Hereafter referred to as *Naval Documents*.
[17] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, May 4, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:155.
[18] "He has neither the talents nor the dignity of character necessary for the purpose." See Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, May 4, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:155.
[19] Julia H. Macleod and Louis B. Wright, *The First Americans in North Africa: William Eaton's Struggle for a Vigorous Policy against the Barbary Pirates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), 19–20.

to procure loans necessary for the ransom of the remaining captives (though this mission proved unsuccessful).

The next year, O'Brien went to the United States where he remained for a several weeks. He was the first American visiting the United States who had been directly involved with the negotiations and could confirm a peace treaty had indeed been negotiated. At the State Department, his opinions on Algerian matters were listened to "with great respect."[20] He was then entrusted to bring part of the promised tribute and ransom to Algiers on board the ship *Sophia*. For this, O'Brien even received a higher salary than Joseph Donaldson who, as secretary to David Humphreys, had previously been sent to negotiate with the Dey of Algiers.[21]

After crossing the Atlantic yet again, O'Brien's first stop was Lisbon, where he coordinated further steps with David Humphreys. Just outside that port, the *Sophia* encountered the *Independent*, the vessel James Cathcart had personally chartered to deliver the correspondence of Joel Barlow to the State Department. Cathcart had also been visiting Humphreys and was just now beginning his voyage to America. After the two former captives met again for the first time after ten months, Cathcart delayed his departure to the United States and sailed back to Lisbon alongside the *Sophia*.

The encounter has been described as disappointing by Cathcart. He had already expressed frustration over the behavior of David Humphreys who had received him for dinner twice. However, as he complained in his journal, "nothing of consequence" was discussed on these occasions.[22] But now, Cathcart learned that he was not even any longer the first former captive to visit the United States. The most important news – the peace treaty with Algiers – had already been communicated by O'Brien. As a result, Cathcart's mission to deliver diplomatic papers to America was now relegated to the management of formalities, while O'Brien was already back to deliver the promised ransom and tribute to the Dey of Algiers. Regarding his meeting with O'Brien, Cathcart commented that it was "pathetic,"[23] and he left for the United States just four days later, on July 23, 1796.[24]

After meeting Cathcart and Humphreys in Lisbon, O'Brien embarked to deliver the promised ransom and tribute, but his ship was captured by Tripolitan cruisers en route to

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[20] H.G. Barnby, *The Prisoners of Algiers: An Account of the Forgotten American-Algerian War 1785–1797* (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 294.
[21] Ibid.
[22] James Leander Cathcart, "The Diplomatic Journal and Letter Book of James Leander Cathcart, 1788–1796," *American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings* 64, pt. 2 (Worcester, MA, 1955), 426. Hereafter referred to as *Diplomatic Journal*.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Cathcart commented that he did not even say his goodbyes to O'Brien before leaving. See Cathcart, *Diplomatic Journal*, 428.

Algiers. After his initial imprisonment, O'Brien was able to convince the Tripolitans that he was indeed carrying tribute to Algiers which led the Bashaw of Tripoli (likely fearful of retaliation by Algiers) to release O'Brien and his ship. After delivering the tribute to the Dey of Algiers, O'Brien coordinated with Joel Barlow (who had arrived in Algiers in March of 1796) and once again went to Tripoli, this time as a diplomatic emissary. O'Brien successfully managed to negotiate a peace treaty with the Bashaw of Tripoli. O'Brien also aided Barlow in negotiating a treaty with the Bey of Tunis during this time.

O'Brien returned to the United States in 1797. During this comparatively brief visit, he was entrusted with overseeing the construction of three vessels that had been requested by the Dey of Algiers (though these were to be purchased, not given as a present). The dey had specifically asked for O'Brien to take up this role. Furthermore, O'Brien was given a supervisory role in the construction of the frigate *Crescent* that had been promised to the Dey of Algiers by Joel Barlow.[25] Cathcart had attempted to gain the latter position for himself but was rebuffed by the dey for whom he had served as chief Christian clerk.[26] After its construction was completed, O'Brien traveled to Algiers on the *Crescent*. He arrived in January of 1798 as the first of the three consuls to reach his post.

It was Cathcart who had first introduced O'Brien to the Dey of Algiers in order to gain permission for him to bring the treaty to David Humphreys. This date, September 11, 1795, Cathcart once identified as O'Brien's "political birthday."[27] Of course, O'Brien's rise to a person of influence and subsequent appointment certainly did not solely stem from getting the opportunity to serve as a diplomatic envoy. Even during his captivity, he had been corresponding with numerous high-profile diplomats, among them David Humphreys and Thomas Jefferson. And yet, O'Brien becoming the chosen emissary set in motion a chain of events which enabled him to personally meet many of those directly involved in Mediterranean foreign policy, and he was evidently capable of making a lasting, positive impression. While rarely stated outright, Cathcart's extant writings strongly suggest that he felt entitled to O'Brien's diplomatic accolades.

Joel Barlow's recommendations to the State Department appear to have had a significant impact on the initial long-term strategy regarding the Barbary States. In a lengthy letter to the

[25] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 98. See also, Richard O'Brien to the Dey of Algiers, December 4, 1797, *Naval Documents*, I:223 and John Adams, "John Adams to United States Congress, June 23, 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-2026. Accessed August 18, 2021.
[26] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 98.
[27] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, William Eaton Papers, Box 2, letters August 4, 1799 – June 20, 1800, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Hereafter cited as HL.

secretary of state, Barlow outlined ideas on how to deal with these regencies effectively. Joel Barlow also appears to have been especially fond of Richard O'Brien and readily recommended him as a candidate for the position of consul. He praised his "sagacity & talents" and further remarked that "a more suitable person than he cannot probably be found to be placed here as consul for the United States. He enjoys the esteem and consideration of the Dey . . . to a degree perhaps unequalled by any foreign agent in the place."[28] It is evident by his appointment that Barlow's word carried some weight in the State Department. As mentioned previously, this constituted yet another setback for Cathcart who had been inquisitive for this position as well.

Moreover, US diplomatic representation in Algiers was considered especially important. For one, Algiers was then equipped with the most powerful navy of all the Barbary States. Another important factor was that Joel Barlow had continuously pressed the idea that Algiers was capable of exercising significant influence over both Tunis and Tripoli. In his letter to the secretary of state, he reported to have placed the treaties with Tunis and Tripoli "under the immediate protection of the Dey of Algiers . . . to diminish the importance of these states as much as possible by increasing that of Algiers. [Because then] the Barbary Beast has but one head, and will be more easily managed."[29] Since Barlow was right at the scene, his advice appears to have been taken seriously in this instance as well.

The special role given to Algiers is reflected in the consular instructions that Richard O'Brien received shortly before departing for Algiers. He was given the title "Consul General," and in this capacity he was charged with "a general superintendence of the affairs of the United States in the Regencies of Tunis and Tripoli."[30] The other consuls were instructed to "constantly correspond" with the consul general, particularly "in cases of difficulty in relation to our peace."[31] In other words, should conflicts over tribute, ransom, or presents arise in any of the other regencies, the consul general was supposed to be the first point of contact and serve as mediator via his influence at the court of Algiers.[32] Likely taking into consideration how difficult it would be for the State Department to quickly respond to potential disputes over the distance of an ocean, most responsibilities were thus relegated to the consulate of Algiers.

This phrasing of the consular instructions is once again reminiscent of Barlow's earlier suggestions. In his letter to the secretary of state he had stated that "consuls at Tunis & Tripoli

[28] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, October 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland. Hereafter referred to as NARA.
[29] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, October 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[30] Secretary of State to Richard O'Brien, December 28, 1797, *Naval Documents*, I:231.
[31] Ibid., I:233.
[32] Ibid., I:232.

should in some sense be subordinate to the one at Algiers, at least so far as to make it their duty to correspond with him, and to state to him all cases of difficulty, that he may obtain the Dey's interference whenever it shall be necessary."[33] Likewise, Barlow's trust in O'Brien's capabilities as a diplomat are mirrored in the consular instructions which start out thusly: "Your intimate acquaintance with the Government of Algiers . . . render minute Instructions unnecessary. Indeed much must be left to the discretion of a Christian Consul at Algiers, hence you feel the weight and importance of your office, and your high responsibility."[34] As can be seen, Barlow's recommendations were followed essentially word-for-word.

Creating the office of "consul general" must have seemed like a sensible decision from the perspective of the State Department. They simply followed the advice of their most high-profile Barbary diplomat, Joel Barlow. Had all three consuls not known each other prior to their respective assignments, this delegation of responsibilities might very well have functioned as intended. However, O'Brien's selection for the position of consul general, in combination with Cathcart being relegated to Tripoli, laid the groundwork for future conflicts among the consuls.

The consular instructions to both James Cathcart and William Eaton differed substantially from those of O'Brien. Their subservience to the consul general was of course communicated to them in no uncertain terms: "The Consuls at Tripoli and Tunis should regularly correspond with him [the consul general], state all difficulties and demands which occur, and on all material points request his opinion and advice. This is not an arrangement of the moment but intended for a permanent system."[35] In addition, the two consuls were given a clear warning with regard to their instructions: "no personal considerations will therefore contravene it."[36] Reminding the consuls not to let their private opinions and feelings interfere with their professional work points to the possibility that members of the State Department were aware of both Eaton's inclinations to personal quarrels as well as Cathcart's previous disputes with Richard O'Brien. Whatever may have been the motivation for including this word of caution, the instructions to O'Brien did not include an equivalent injunction. Thus, the consular instructions clearly set up a stringent system of hierarchy in which the consul general was given particular importance.

The relationship between O'Brien and Cathcart had already been tainted when both were held captive in Algiers. The fact that Cathcart was once more denied a position equal to

[33] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, October 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[34] Secretary of State to Richard O'Brien, December 28, 1797, *Naval Documents*, I:231.
[35] Secretary of State to James Cathcart, December 20, 1798, *Naval Documents*, I:274.
[36] Ibid.

that of O'Brien was another setback: "Cathcart felt himself to be the obvious choice to become America's new consul general, given his prior service as chief Christian clerk to the Dey and his familiarity with Algerian governance and its influential personalities. The rejection greatly wounded his pride."[37] As has been argued, relying on his position as chief Christian clerk was likely already a questionable qualification in the eyes of outsiders, because it suggested a closer allegiance to Algiers than to the United States. But after Hassan Dey died in May of 1798, Cathcart's main argument for attaining the office of consul general was in effect rendered altogether null and void.

**A Struggle for Prestige: Origins of the Cathcart-O'Brien Feud**

As consuls, Cathcart and O'Brien would emerge as bitter adversaries throughout their tenure at the North African coast. Cathcart initiated the rivalry, whereas O'Brien by and large ignored Cathcart's increasingly malicious behavior. And while the antagonism toward O'Brien almost certainly also stemmed from both personal dislike as well as jealousy, their conflict was primarily described as a contest for personal honor. Cathcart's characterization of their feud provides insights into underlying social expectations through which such conflicts were understood. His correspondence with William Eaton outlines many aspects surrounding this struggle for honor, such as the publicity, accountability, and even gender roles. In the following, there will be a brief description of the circumstances by which the feud originated, followed by an analysis of Cathcart's characterization of the events in question.

James Cathcart and William Eaton arrived in Algiers on February 9, 1799, a year after Richard O'Brien had taken up residence there. The two consuls were to stop in Algiers on their way to Tunis, where they were supposed to renegotiate certain provisions of the peace treaty with the bey. Whereas Eaton had decided to leave his spouse in the United States, Cathcart was accompanied by his wife Jane whom he had married shortly after his return to America. To keep the newly-weds company, they were also joined by an English maid named Betsy Robeson.[38]

[37] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 96.

[38] There appears to be some confusion over the name of Cathcart's maid. Robert J. Allison refers to her with her full name, "Elizabeth Robeson." See, Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 165. Elsewhere, she is referred to as "Betsy Robinson," see Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 100. However, Cathcart himself referred to the maid as "Betsy Robeson" which is why that is name used here. See James Cathcart to Timothy Pickering, July 9, 1799 in *Tripoli. First War with the United States. Inner History. Letter Book By James Leander Cathcart, First Consul to Tripoli and Last Letters From Tunis,* edited by J.B. Cathcart Newkirk, D.A.R. (LaPorte, Indiana: Herald Print, 1901), 51. Hereafter referred to as *Letter Book*. Julia H. Macleod and Louis B. Wright also give the same name in their book. See Macleod and Wright, *The First Americans in North Africa*, 30.

It remains unclear what exactly occurred, but Cathcart and his maid had a falling out during the 36 days of their transatlantic voyage. Some scholars concluded that "Cathcart had tried to be too free with the girl and had been rebuffed."[39] Whatever happened, Robeson quit working for Cathcart and his wife and intended to return to the United States immediately upon arriving in Algiers. In the meantime, she sought refuge at Richard O'Brien's consular residence until her return trip could be arranged. Evidently, O'Brien seized this opportunity to court Ms. Robeson, as the two married on March 25, 1799, a mere six weeks after Robeson's arrival. Cathcart left Algiers in early March and learned about the wedding only after it had already taken place.

The correspondence of Cathcart indicates that the events surrounding his former maid constituted a final provocation. As has been argued previously, Cathcart had been continuously rebuked throughout his captivity in Algiers and during his subsequent appointments and commissions, particularly in comparison to Richard O'Brien. O'Brien had been able to deliver the Algerian peace treaty to David Humphreys, despite Cathcart's insistence to have been the primary figure responsible for its successful negotiation. As a direct result of this commission, O'Brien was the first of the captives to reach the United States; he delivered tribute to Algiers; he negotiated a peace treaty with Tripoli; he became a personal friend of Joel Barlow who heartily recommended him in letters to the secretary of state; he had been commissioned with overseeing the construction of American vessels intended for the Dey of Algiers; and he was appointed to the prestigious office of consul general. As will be shown, Cathcart clearly regarded himself entitled to being publicly recognized and rewarded for at least some of O'Brien's accomplishments. Instead, as if to add insult to injury, O'Brien now deprived him and his wife of their personal maid.

Eaton and Cathcart did not leave for Tunis until March 2, roughly four weeks after their arrival in Algiers. During this time, the Cathcarts were invited to dine at O'Brien's house. At the occasion, O'Brien proposed that Robeson should sit at the same table as them. The idea of his former maid joining the consul and his wife as an equal deeply offended Cathcart. In a letter to William Eaton, he stated that "I conceived this proposal as a pointed insult, and told him he was master of his own house, but if he took her to table with us, he might depend that neither Mrs. Cathcart nor myself would accompany him, as we had no idea of making a companion of

[39] Macleod and Wright, *The First Africans in North Africa*, 30.

our domestic."[40] Cathcart described the event as an affront to his sensibilities, and the conflict between the two consuls further escalated after the marriage between O'Brien and Robeson.[41]

Becoming the wife of the consul general meant in effect that Robeson was now socially superior to his wife: "Mrs. Cathcart was desolate that her former 'humble companion' had now stepped a notch ahead of her in diplomatic protocol."[42] Even Eaton knew enough of the dispute at this point to observe "how they will be chafed on the occasion," though he personally said the news brought him "great joy."[43] James Cathcart himself seemed very surprised by this turn of events and even expressed his "astonishment" regarding their marriage in a report to the secretary of state, although he refrained from sharing any further details with his superior.[44]

In November of 1799, Cathcart laid out his criticisms of O'Brien in an extensive and detailed letter to his colleague, William Eaton. In eight hand-written pages, Cathcart made the case against O'Brien based on occurrences dating back from the end of their captivity right up to the wedding, a three-and-a-half-year time span. Long sections of this letter are dedicated to contrasting O'Brien's behavior with Cathcart's as a means of presenting the latter in a favorable light at the expense of the former. There were also numerous direct insults and accusations of lying. As will be shown, the letter represents an illustrative example of Cathcart making an attempt to present himself as the more honorable person in the eyes of its recipient(s).

In the first instance, the letter was sent to Cathcart's presumed social equal whose rank as consul to Tunis mirrored that of his. William Eaton had been pushed to the sidelines of a conflict that had been in the making for over a decade. As the only person unacquainted with Barbary affairs, it appears that he maintained a cautionary approach at first, without taking any sides. Cathcart affirmed as much when mentioning "the friendship you profess for both of us [Cathcart and O'Brien]" in his letter.[45] In this sense, then, Eaton served as the primary audience of this letter, as someone only indirectly involved in the dispute and a potential arbiter in the conflict that involved two consuls in a triangular relationship.

In a larger sense, the State Department may also be perceived as an audience for the letter. While written in seemingly personal terms, Cathcart must have realized that these letters might at some point be read by officials in the United States. In the Barbary States, disputes

[40] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.
[41] The historian Robert Allison has pointed to the irony of the fact that "a representative of republican America would refuse to eat at the same table with a servant." See Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 165.
[42] Macleod and Wright, *The First Africans in North Africa*, 30.
[43] William Eaton to Richard O'Brien, May 1, 1799, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December, 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[44] James Cathcart to Timothy Pickering, July 9, 1799 in *Letter Book*, 51.
[45] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.

over the peace treaties as well as tribute and ransom were likely to arise. Consequently, the papers of the consuls would be among the first documents to be consulted when assessing responsibilities, planning the course of action, or even simply obtaining an understanding of past events in general. What is more, copies of the official correspondence were usually left at the consular houses whenever a consul retired. These documents were considered important intelligence for new consuls to learn about the current state of affairs.[46] Both his superiors in the United States as well as potential successors of William Eaton can thus be interpreted as also composing a potential readership for Cathcart's letter.

Lastly, Cathcart must have been aware that there was at least a possibility of these letters being read by an even wider audience. As Joanne Freeman has argued in this context: "Personal correspondence was not always private in the eighteenth century. Letters miscarried or turned up in the hands of enemies who circulated or published them. An accusation in a signed letter could easily become public knowledge, transforming it into an open insult that dishonored the victim in the public eye."[47] Of course, the odds of these personal quarrels becoming the focus of public attention were comparatively slim. But events such as the XYZ Affair proved that the private correspondence of diplomats was at least capable of causing controversy, outrage, and in this case even warlike measures. Thus, Cathcart might very well have considered the possibility of his letters being made public or perhaps used as evidence against him in some way.

At first, Cathcart reassured Eaton that his personal differences with O'Brien would not affect his professional conduct as consul.[48] Stressing his integrity, he stated that "I do and shall correspond with the Consul General of the United States at Algiers, with more punctuality and precision than I probably might think necessary were we on terms of intimacy, not withstanding I have not received one answer to the many submissions I have made to him since my arrival here [Tripoli]."[49] Even in this introductory section, Cathcart subtly accused his rival of withholding information from him and making his work more difficult as a result.

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[46] Refusing to turn over these documents to successors was considered highly irregular behavior. For example, when Cathcart arrived at his post in Tripoli, he criticized the former chargé d'affaires who had "not left a single document in his Office, he has taken even the treaty away with him." See James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, April 13, 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:322.

[47] Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), 69.

[48] As will be shown, Cathcart later admitted to having withheld information from O'Brien, thus violating his espoused principle.

[49] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.

However, Cathcart went on to explain that he had no intentions to make amends until O'Brien (referred to as "ungrateful,"[50]) would offer an explanation for his supposed past misconduct. Cathcart then added a list of questions for which he still expected an answer. This list begins by Cathcart asking "whether during the period of Ten years captivity I did not treat him as a brother, my interest and purse being always at his service [?]"[51] Though he was not providing many details here, Cathcart was likely referring to the instances where he had furnished O'Brien with luxury items which he was able to procure because of the profits from his taverns and through his position as chief Christian clerk, as mentioned in *The Captives*.[52]

Cathcart proceeded in chronological order. Still referring to the time of their captivity, he asked "Whether I did not recommend him to the Dey to carry our Dispatches from Algiers and by that means sacrificed eight months of my time in order to serve him, I having proposed to carry said dispatches myself at the same time furnishing him with the means to defray his expenses?"[53] In this context, Cathcart also stressed that he had first introduced O'Brien to the Dey of Algiers. Furthermore, he accused O'Brien of not writing after departing from Algiers, even though he "had sacrificed his liberty to serve him" and "had remained a slave to let his friend be free."[54] Cathcart had already expressed frustration over O'Brien's behavior in his journal at the time. Notably, these events continued to be a source of discontent some four years later.

Although O'Brien was criticized in no uncertain terms, Cathcart nevertheless adhered to a certain protocol in his letter. For one, Cathcart was careful to back up many of his accusations. With regard to O'Brien's alleged misconduct during their captivity, Cathcart stated that "said facts are so well known to all American captives and several others that were in Algiers, it is surmised that Mr. O'Brien cannot deny them?"[55] While it was not specified, Cathcart was likely referring to Joseph Donaldson and Joel Barlow when referring to "others." These were the only Americans that also visited the regency toward the end of his captivity, although it is doubtful in what capacity these would have been willing to verify any of the claims in his letter.[56]

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] James Cathcart, *The Captives: Eleven Years a Prisoner in Algiers* (La Porte, Indiana: Herald Print, 1899), 138.
[53] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] As has been argued previously, Barlow clearly favored O'Brien over Cathcart. Cathcart also described to have had a dispute with Joseph Donaldson in *The Captives*, so it also seems unlikely that he would have vouched for Cathcart.

In addition, Cathcart claimed that O'Brien had acknowledged his generous behavior and had expressed his gratitude in "several letters which he wrote me during the time of our captivity."[57] The fact that Cathcart alluded to specific pieces of evidence for his claims, both in the form of letters and potential witnesses, points to an awareness that the content of his letter would be regarded as an extremely serious attack on O'Brien's personal honor. Without proof for his claims, Cathcart himself would have been susceptible to accusations of libel and slander which could potentially harm his reputation instead. The proverbial "court of public opinion" was taken at face value in this instance, and evidence was a key component in proving the veracity of Cathcart's accusation.

Up until this point, Cathcart had described numerous instances of O'Brien acting impolitely and in an inconsiderate fashion. In the letter's next section, however, Cathcart shifted toward more serious accusations, beginning with calling O'Brien a liar: "Why did Mr. O'Brien on his arrival in Philadelphia say in public company that he was the man that introduced me to the Dey, and arrogate the whole of the service I had rendered our country to himself and by so doing reverse the truth?"[58] Unfortunately, Cathcart did not specify whether he was referring to O'Brien's first trip to Philadelphia in mid-1796 or his return to the US in early 1797. Since both men were in Philadelphia at the same time around March/April of 1797, it seems likely that this is the time period Cathcart was referencing. If, on the other hand, he was speaking about O'Brien's short visit to the US in 1796, he would have no way of verifying these claims other than by reports after the fact.

The characterization of O'Brien as an outright liar constituted an extremely serious accusation. For one, he had put this allegation in writing which produced immediate accountability. Should O'Brien become aware of the letter, this could have led to more serious consequences. To call a person of rank a liar "was equivalent to striking a man: it became an immediate justification for a challenge to a duel."[59] These allegations against O'Brien constituted a risky attempt to win over Eaton's favor, especially when considering that there are no references to any hard evidence in this section, meaning that these statements remained unverifiable and potentially libelous as a result.

The section also reflects a deep anxiety over being credited publicly for one's deeds. Cathcart repeatedly touted his influence at the court of Algiers during his captivity there, and

[57] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.
[58] Ibid.
[59] (Of course, this only held true under the assumption that the two shared the same social rank.) Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 67.

he expressed pride in helping with negotiating the peace treaty alongside Joseph Donaldson and of course the esteemed Joel Barlow.[60] (It seems that Cathcart remained unaware that some of his peers were skeptical of his close relations with Dey of Algiers.) Even three years after these events, his former role as quasi-diplomat remained of the utmost importance to him. Whether his description of O'Brien's conduct was truthful or not, Cathcart very clearly regarded himself deprived of public recognition (the advancement of his personal honor) for his role in bringing about the release of the American captives.

The next section includes the comparatively mild charge that O'Brien had recommended a supposedly less qualified person over Cathcart to command the *Crescent* to bring tribute to Algiers.[61] Since it was O'Brien himself who ultimately sailed on this vessel to take up his post as consul general, this allegation, accurate or not, proved largely inconsequential.

What follows, though, is a description of the first outright conflict between the two prior to their falling out in Algiers. The events Cathcart described must have occurred at some point in mid-1797, when both men were in the United States at the same time.

> After my appointment, why did Mr. O'Brien say in company with an oath that Cathcart should never go to Barbary if he could help it! Until this happen'd I never intimated to Mr. O'Brien that I was displeased or knew of his conduct. I was informed of it in the evening and waited on him at his lodgings next morning, not with the most christian intentions I assure you. I ask'd him his motives for saying the above; he swore he had never said any such thing and brought witnesses who deposed that Mr. O'Brien had said he would be damn'd if I should go to Tripoli if he could help it, he having intended to recommend to the Secretary of State to send me to Tunis it being a place of greater consequence than Tripoli. What a farce to pretend to recommend me several months after our appointment had taken place. However as he condescended to make some sort of an excuse, tho' in my opinion it was a lame one, I thought proper to drop the affair, tho' I never treated him with familiarity afterwards.[62]

The characterization of this series of events outlines several important aspects of how personal conflicts were expected to be resolved.

Firstly, Cathcart once more emphasized that he was defamed publicly ("in company") which he described as the primary motivation for directly confronting O'Brien. Moreover, unlike his rival, Cathcart presented himself as having endured the sleights against him without having his frustrations outwardly known, thus indicating control over his emotions and a

[60] This is not only evident by the letter's previous assertions but more explicitly stated in *The Captives*, as discussed previously.
[61] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.
[62] Ibid.

capacity for tolerating impolite behavior.[63] He demonstrated his own professional conduct by indicating that he had not complained about the numerous instances of alleged misbehavior that occurred previously on the part of O'Brien, who, therefore, does not exhibit the same cordial manners.

And yet, Cathcart stated that he continued to adhere to social norms in meeting with O'Brien privately (instead of publicly) to challenge his alleged claims. (Although he did admit having been rather confrontational when saying he did not have "the most christian motives.") Both men evidently took the dispute immensely serious, as several witnesses were then called to verify or disprove Cathcart's allegations. The initial encounter transformed into something resembling more of a court room setting as opposed to a private conversation. What might have been perceived as seemingly trivial remarks by O'Brien became subject to an extensive investigation which demonstrates the weight and potential consequences of public challenges to personal honor.

Interestingly, Cathcart then focused on the futility of O'Brien having recommended him to the consulship of Tunis after appointments had already taken place. Cathcart mentioning his appointment in this context also reveals another aspect of the difficult position in which Cathcart was as consul to Tripoli. He conceded that Tunis was considered more important than Tripoli and even added: "I never solicited to be appointed for Algiers, I applied for the consulate of Tunis or Tripoli, got what I asked for, and therefore I had no reason to complain of Government for having appointed O'Brien at Algiers."[64] Of course, there *is* evidence in a letter by Joel Barlow that Cathcart had solicited to become consul to Algiers which is hardly surprising, considering that he appears to have thought of himself as uniquely qualified as former chief Christian clerk.[65] But downplaying the difference between Tunis and Tripoli was strategically advantageous, considering that the letter's recipient was the consul to Tunis. Here, Cathcart outlined common ground between himself and Eaton to the exclusion of the consul general. Though this is not addressed outright, both must have been aware of the irony that it was Eaton – with no prior experience in Barbary affairs whatsoever – who occupied a slightly more significant position than Cathcart.

Cathcart concluded his remarks on O'Brien's supposed professional misconduct by raising the prospect that O'Brien, whom he alleged had conspired against him out of "fear and

[63] This notwithstanding, Cathcart had at this point commented on O'Brien's conduct in an extremely critical manner in his personal journals.
[64] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.
[65] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, May 4, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:155.

jealousy," might challenge his accusations.[66] He stated that if O'Brien were to "forge pretences to injure me at the Seat of Government, I shall endeavour to be prepared for the event and shall provide myself with such [means] as will inevitably confute every allegation that is not founded on the strictest veracity."[67] The State Department thus remained a distinct audience and an arbiter of these conflicts. Additionally, Cathcart probably wished to reassure Eaton that he had enough evidence to emerge victorious from any potential official inquiry or legal dispute between himself and O'Brien.

Lastly, Cathcart described the incidents relating to his former maid. First, he provided a brief account of him and his wife refusing to have dinner with Robeson sitting at their table. However, his main complaint was O'Brien's subsequent relationship with Robeson: "[O'Brien] used every means to entice her from the service of a young innocent creature who was in a Barbarous Country . . . who understood no language but her own, and was in the seventh month of her pregnancy."[68] Cathcart here emphasized the unfortunate lot of his wife who now could not enjoy company adequate to her station (a female companion of her own race and with a similar cultural background) while being close to childbirth.

But Cathcart then added that O'Brien's conduct was also an insult to his person, as he was supposedly greatly indebted to him because of the sacrifices during their captivity: "to aggravate the crime, this innocent creature was the wife of a man . . . to whom he had declared that all he ever would be worth in the world would be too little to repay, and whom to serve he would voluntarily risque his life."[69] Once again, these statements likely alluded to the supposed debt O'Brien had accrued during their captivity, when Cathcart provided O'Brien with luxury items and recommended him to the Dey of Algiers. Once more, it is noteworthy that Cathcart still invoked these points years after the fact.

Crucially, Cathcart did not criticize the fact that O'Brien had taken Robeson as his wife on general principle. Rather, he pointed out the way O'Brien had done so:

> [I] only ask why Mr. O'Brien if he had taken a liking to the girl, did not declare it openly, why did he not behave with candor and request Mrs. Cathcart to part with her as a man of honor should have done; I would not have opposed the girl's good fortune tho' I certainly would have advised our *Consul General* to have pursued a different line of conduct for view the match in either a public or private light it cannot [be conducive] either to his honor or interest.[70]

[66] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 9, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Emphasis added. Ibid.

The main conflict for Cathcart was thus the supposedly dishonorable conduct of O'Brien. The proper way to court Ms. Robeson would have been to ask Cathcart's permission. Additionally, he pointed out that O'Brien has dishonored himself by marrying someone so much beneath his own social status. Cathcart indicated this by referring to O'Brien as "Consul General" (emphasizing his rank) rather than using his name or a pronoun in the latter part of the quote.

The conflict is also revealing of existing gender roles in their relation to honor at the time. Notably, women were placed outside the realm of (masculine) honor in this context entirely.[71] Betsy Robeson's decision was never even considered in Cathcart's account of events. He clearly put the insult to his honor (and only by extension that of his wife) at the center of the dispute. Cathcart presented himself as entitled to decide over Robeson's fate in this instance. His inability to do so was what insulted him.

The beginnings of official diplomatic relations with the Barbary States were thus overshadowed by personal conflict. In his correspondence, Cathcart almost immediately violated his instructions by prioritizing his personal sensibilities over his professional conduct as consul. As has been shown, Cathcart perceived himself to have endured numerous humiliations at the hands of O'Brien, some of which occurred several years prior. Repeatedly, Cathcart stressed the publicity of his embarrassments as well as the fact that he felt himself deprived of recognition for his role as quasi-diplomat during his captivity.

In a broader sense, these accusations, complaints, and grievances outlined the social expectations surrounding struggles over personal honor. Cathcart's letter points to a keen awareness of the potential publicity of his accusations. In anticipation of this, evidence was invoked to give his statements the veneer of validity. While honor might intuitively be associated with emotional qualities, the treatise-like fashion in which Cathcart presented his arguments proves otherwise. Despite being rather intangible, honor was dressed in ostensibly *rational* language which, in turn, reveals honor itself to be a *rationale* despite its rather arbitrary and amorphous nature. More than mere rhetoric, this mode of writing and arguing appears to have been the accepted way of expressing discontent, thus serving as "a discourse – a rhetoric and a cultural practice – with which to shape the way [to] interact, to identify insiders and outsiders in a community, or to pursue conflict."[72] Even though Cathcart described these highly

[71] This approach mirrors Robert A. Nye's understanding of women in modern France's honor culture: "Women had no real place in this system of honor. They were only permitted to safeguard their sexual honor, which in truth belonged to their husbands, fathers, and brothers, who were ultimately responsible for its integrity and defense." See Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), vii.

[72] Nancy Shields Kollmann, *By Honor Bound: State and Society in Early Modern Russia* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 29.

personal and emotional experiences in his correspondence, these were still presented within the perceived "honor group" in accordance with the cultural norms surrounding this discourse of honor.[73]

**The Gentleman's Perspective: Richard O'Brien in Algiers**

Unlike his colleague, Richard O'Brien by and large did not engage in personal quarrels but instead focused on the management of diplomatic relations between the regency of Algiers and the United States. Between the years 1798 and 1800, O'Brien mostly provided the State Department with policy recommendations and consular reports in congruence with his instructions. In most of his correspondence, O'Brien emphasized his professional conduct by utilizing a seemingly objective mode of writing.[74] As such, the correspondence of Richard O'Brien may be regarded as an example of personal honor claims going unchallenged. Throughout his tenure at the Barbary Coast, O'Brien's status as an honorable gentleman and skilled diplomat appears to have been well respected by his peers.[75] In this role, O'Brien mostly provided the State Department with his expert opinions. The following section will provide three examples of how O'Brien strategically invoked the language of expertise, affirmed control over his emotions, and emphasized his own diplomatic capabilities to solidify his professional and social rank.

One early challenge which became particularly relevant for engaging with the Barberry States related to the identification of American ships. There was not yet one uniform flag in use to represent the United States. Even if there had been, as new states entered the union, the requisite number of stars and stripes on some of these early variants changed constantly. As a result, American vessels displayed a variety of different flags. Even prior to taking up the post as consul general, O'Brien had complained about the diversity of flags displayed by the US merchant marine: "they sometimes run paralel & sometimes perpendicular to the staff, they are sometimes without stars, sometimes with the stars and eagle, and sometimes with the Irish harp."[76] Of fifteen US ships harbored in Lisbon, O'Brien observed "not three of them had

[73] Generally, honor groups are conceptualized as "a set of people who follow the same code of honor and who recognize each other as doing so." See, Frank Henderson Steward, *Honor* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54.
[74] One historian has even praised O'Brien's letters as "models of clarity and unaffected good reason." See Barnby, *The Prisoners of Algiers*, 305.
[75] Of course, this is discounting William Eaton and James Cathcart who served in subordinate positions.
[76] Richard O'Brien to Secretary of State, October 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.

colours exactly alike."[77] Additionally, it seems that ships also sometimes displayed the flags of their respective state in lieu of the evolving flag of the United States.[78]

When dealing with the Barbary States, however, the lack of a uniform flag constituted a pressing danger. O'Brien noted that the Barbary States might exploit the current state of affairs and find excuses to capture American vessels. He stressed that "it is by the Flag, as well as at the passport, that vessels are known at sea."[79] It followed that if the flag known to Algerians did not match the flag displayed by American merchant vessels, this could be interpreted as sufficient reason to capture and enslave the crews of these vessels.[80] Even if the Algerians would be presented with the so-called "Mediterranean passes," which theoretically ensured safe passage, O'Brien asserted that "the Algerines will not belive or know them to be Americans. Why[?] because they have not American Colours & they know nothing about State Colours – They will declare they made a peace with one nation & one flag, not with 16 nations & 16 flags."[81] The issue remained an important topic in Richard O'Brien's correspondence throughout the late 1790s.

These reports seem to indicate that many Americans had yet to strongly identify with the flag as representative for the country at large. With regard to the colonial period, vexillologist and historian Scot Michael Guenter has argued that "flags do not appear to have been a factor in the everyday life of colonists, with the exception of those whose livelihood was connected to maritime pursuits."[82] This attitude appears to have prevailed even after political ties with Great Britain were severed. Notably, even within the seafaring community – where flags were of practical importance as means of communication and identification – there had yet to emerge a universally applied set of standards.

The flag was not widely regarded as the predominant national symbol until after the second war with Great Britain, particularly after the gradual popularization of Francis Scott Key's *The Star-Spangled Banner* which would eventually become the US national anthem.[83] Prior, it appeared alongside "symbols of the revolutionary period such as busts of Washington,

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[77] Richard O'Brien, "Captain O'Brien's Negotiations in Barbary, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 3, NARA.
[78] Richard O'Brien to Secretary of State, October 12, 1798, *Naval Documents*, I:262.
[79] Richard O'Brien to Secretary of State, October 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.
[80] O'Brien reported at least one such instance of an American vessel being seized and brought to Algiers. However, through negotiations, he was able to have the crew released. See Richard O'Brien to Secretary of State, October 12, 1798, *Naval Documents*, I:258–262.
[81] Ibid., I:262.
[82] Scot Michael Guenter, *The American Flag 1777–1924: Cultural Shifts from Creation to Codification* (London & Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990), 26.
[83] Ibid., 42.

eagles, and seals of the Republic, liberty goddesses and freedom trees."[84] The eagle as a metaphor for the nascent United States was indeed occasionally invoked in diplomatic correspondence. For example, American consul to Lisbon, Edward Church, once commented on the intrigues of European countries: "England & Spain seem to be plotting in what way they can most effectually clip our Eagle's Wings, They are both extremely envious of her soaring."[85] The flag, by contrast, was rarely given such symbolic veneration.

By problematizing the use of disparate flags by the American merchant marine, Richard O'Brien could establish himself as a person with a keen eye on details. From the perspective of the State Department, this seemingly trivial aspect to commerce was likely not considered problematic (perhaps it was even thought necessary) for interstate commerce in the United States. But across the Atlantic, different rules prevailed. In a larger sense, O'Brien's commentary indicates that the professionalization of American commerce (at this point in time) was just beginning.

During the initial postcolonial era, more personal forms of national identifications prevailed: "In these early years of American nationalism, the beginnings of a civil religion, explaining the purpose of the United States in terms of a society destined for greatness, focused not on the flag, but on other more anthropomorphic symbols."[86] The most popular person to serve as such a representation of the United States at large was indisputably George Washington. Unsurprisingly, when the news Washington's of death crossed the Atlantic, it caused a mild stir on the Barbary Coast. The occasion called for the diplomats to reconcile the expression of socially expected emotional reactions (e.g. mourning) with the management of diplomatic relations. It was custom to give consular presents whenever the head of state of a friendly nation died. Although he had no longer been president, Washington's universal acclaim was sure to spark similar demands. Of course, it was also the responsibility of the consuls to avoid providing the Barbary rulers with presents whenever possible. The different responses of the consuls are worthy of brief consideration.

In Tripoli, there was James Cathcart. Unlike his colleagues, Cathcart apparently did not take into account that the death of George Washington might constitute an occasion for a gift. Far from attempting to conceal the news, he did the opposite: "Cathcart . . . ordered the flag at the U.S. consulate lowered, and had all the American ships in the harbor do the same and offer

[84] Arnaldo Testi, *Capture the Flag: The Stars and Stripes in American History* (New York & London: New York University Press, 2010), 26.
[85] Edward Church to Thomas Jefferson, February 22, 1793, *Naval Documents*, I:46.
[86] Guenter, *The American Flag*, 38–39.

a twenty one-gun salute."[87] Unsurprisingly, the Tripolitans soon discovered the reason for the occasion. This caused the Bashaw of Tripoli to contrive demands for a present to appease his mourning.[88] Cathcart's conduct has been described by one historian as "remarkably inept," implying that his actions gave rise to new demands unintentionally.[89] However, given Cathcart's decade-long experience at the Barbary Coast, this assessment might be questionable. An alternative interpretation would be that Cathcart regarded it his duty to pay his respects to George Washington regardless of what the result might be. Whatever the reason, the fact that all three consuls reacted to the event in one way or another, demonstrates the importance of Washington as a symbol for the United States.

In Tunis, William Eaton pursued a more cautionary approach, although his conduct proved risky as well. Eaton reported that he attempted to stop the news from spreading. However, he admitted to mentioning it to consuls with whom he believed to be "in the habits of sympathy and confidence."[90] As a former soldier, it appears that he still felt compelled to show some expression of grief. Thus, he decided to wear a black armband. This caught the attention of a Tunisian official. When asked, Eaton responded that an officer under whom he had served had died, but he withheld further information. This strategy appears to have worked in his favor, as Eaton further reported that "no further questions were asked."[91]

Privately, however, Eaton did not refrain from reacting to Washington's death in a more passionate manner. In a letter to Richard O'Brien, he shared the news thusly: "that on the 14. Dec. died at Mount Vernon . . . the Illustrious George Washington (that was a dark day in America; in Heaven it was brilliant)."[92] Likewise, in a letter to the State Department, he described Washington as "the greatest man who ever died."[93] Eaton habitually underlined some of his words for emphasis. In this instance, it served to highlight his admiration for the late president. In his use of such emotionally charged prose, he differed substantially from Richard O'Brien's more disinterested way of reporting, both to his colleagues as well as to the State Department. As a former soldier, Eaton managed to mourn the deceased former president in accordance with the perceived social expectations while preventing new demands by the Tunisian ruler.

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[87] Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 171.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 170.
[90] William Eaton to James Cathcart, October 1, 1800, "Letterbook December 14, 1799 – June 28, 1801," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[91] Ibid.
[92] William Eaton to Richard O'Brien, March 1, 1800, "Letterbook and Journal, December 14, 1799 – June 28, 1801," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[93] William Eaton to James Cathcart, October 1, 1800, "Letterbook and Journal, December 14, 1799 – June 28, 1801," William Eaton Papers, HL.

O'Brien refrained from expressing emotions upon the death of George Washington in the way his colleagues did. Indeed, the lack of commentary on the part of O'Brien makes it difficult to make any meaningful statement about his reaction. Most likely, however, he considered such a response inappropriate for a man of his status, or perhaps the news simply did not leave enough of an impression on him to comment extensively. In any event, his reaction may be interpreted as guided primarily by expedience: He prevented the news from becoming more widely known by ordering the confiscation of all newspapers that reported on the death of Washington.[94] As a result, there were no demands for a present by the Dey of Algiers. In this, O'Brien enacted a policy mostly informed by the practical interest of the moment.

Another opportunity for O'Brien to pursue the interest of the United States presented itself during negotiations with the new Dey of Algiers. Hassan Bashaw, the Dey of Algiers who had presided over the capture of American citizens in 1785 and 1793, and with whom the treaty of peace had been negotiated, died on May 15, 1798. He was succeeded by Dey Mustafa (Hassan's prime minister) who held the position until 1805. Prior to his death, Hassan Bashaw had requested three vessels to be built in America which he intended to purchase from the United States. The outbreak of yellow fever in the United States had delayed the construction of these ships, and they only arrived belatedly in the early months of 1799. Dey Mustafa wished to receive the vessels as gifts which caused long negotiations between Algerian officials and Richard O'Brien. The dispute provided the latter with an opportunity to hone his diplomatic skills as well as to strike a bargain with Algiers' new leader. The report on the matter may be regarded as exemplary of the ways in which O'Brien frequently managed to reinforce an image of himself as a skilled diplomat in the eyes of the letter's recipient(s). But he also emphasized the importance of the reputation of the United States overseas as an important aspect of diplomacy at the court of Algiers.

The three vessels did not arrive at the coast of Algiers simultaneously. On January 23, the *Leila Eisha* was the first ship to arrive, and Dey Mustafa immediately expressed his desire to receive the vessel as a gift. According to O'Brien's report, he was able to present papers to the general of the marine that confirmed the former dey had intended to purchase the vessels. However, the two agreed that it would be ill-advised to show these to Dey Mustafa, because it was reputed that the new dey was not particularly fond of his predecessor.[95] To demand money for the vessel, O'Brien noted, would likely have insulted the dey's sensibilities.

[94] Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 170–171.
[95] Richard O'Brien, "Particulars Relative to the Affairs of the United States of America at Algiers Commencing in Feb[ruary] to the End of March 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:290.

Still, O'Brien decided that he could not simply give away the ship without any compensation. His refusal apparently outraged Mustafa who "declared by his faith & honor as a Musselman, that the Consul of the U.S. had arrived to trick him."[96] Furthermore, it was pointed out that his predecessor had received a frigate (the *Crescent*) as a gift, therefore, the dey inquired, "is not the present Dey to be as much noticed, respected & honor'd [?]"[97] There were few arguments with which O'Brien could rebuke the dey. The United States had already fallen behind in the payment of annual tribute, and the last shipment of naval stores that arrived in Algiers was found to be deficient. However, instead of conceding to Algerian demands, O'Brien "decided to bargain with the appearance of strength."[98] This strength, however, was by and large an improvised fabrication.

While in port, the *Leila Eisha*, O'Brien reported, had hoisted the Algerian flag at the main mast, "as a usual compliment to the City."[99] The general of the marine then requested the flag to be lowered to signal the strained relations between the two countries, after the dey did not receive the ship as a gift. O'Brien resorted to the following action: "On this I went to the Marine & ordered the [Algerian] flag to be hawled down & the same time ordered Capt. Maley to hoist his American pendant & fire a gun – after this all Algiers declared that the Dey intended to make war with the Americans."[100] It is at least doubtful whether O'Brien risked peaceful relations by lowering the Algerian flag and firing a shot. Possibly, this demonstration of American determination was inserted by O'Brien after the negotiations had been successful.

Nevertheless, despite the uncertain nature of US-Algerian relations at that point, O'Brien also added that he informed the Algerian government that "we were making great preparations against the French" as well as "that the King of England has requested of the U.S. to make an alliance for 100 years."[101] O'Brien making use of this strategy seems credible. In fact, he had employed a similar strategy during his captivity, when he had forged a letter by supposed merchants that included false reports of an alliance between England and the United States and greatly exaggerated American naval strength.[102] While the strategy had failed in 1794, some five years later the United States was now in possession of a navy. Furthermore,

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[96] Ibid., I:291.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 161.
[99] Richard O'Brien, "Particulars Relative to the Affairs of the United States of America at Algiers Commencing in Feb[ruary] to the End of March 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:291.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Cumingham & Nisbitt to Richard O'Brien, June 18, 1794, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 1, NARA.

the actions undertaken against France were rooted in reality. The proposed alliance between England and the United States, on the other hand, was entirely fabricated.

To indicate a US-British alliance made sense from a strategic standpoint. The United Kingdom remained the most respected European power at the Barbary Coast, because it was equipped with the most powerful fleet of its time. The remark about the United States arming against the French had two primary effects. Firstly, like the United States, Algiers was at war with France. O'Brien thus hinted at a common enemy. Additionally, mentioning that the United States was increasing its naval capabilities also served as a veiled threat and implied that newly constructed warships might at some point be used against Algiers as well. Lastly, O'Brien might have used the prospect of alliances as an opportunity to hint at the possibility that a declaration of war against the United States might result in an alliance with France against Algiers, true to the old adage that the enemy of an enemy is a friend.

O'Brien further exaggerated American naval strength in an attempt to intimidate the Dey of Algiers. Once more, similar to the letter he had forged in 1794, O'Brien greatly overstated the size of the US Navy. Commenting on the willingness to go to war, he reportedly stated to an Algerian general that "we had 40 Sail of corsairs at sea, that many more were building . . . & that we woud sooner lose our peace this time."[103] None of these statements were founded on information O'Brien was privy to at the time. He had not received instructions from the State Department until Cathcart and Eaton arrived on the *Sophia* a few days later, and the number of vessels he mentioned was inaccurate. This risky strategy appears to have proven successful (at least for a while), as he remarked that for a few days "our affairs remained something quiet."[104]

However, after the arrival of the two remaining armed vessels (*Skolderbrand*[105] and *Hassen Bashaw*), the negotiations were renewed. With regard to the former vessel, O'Brien noted that the "Dey and ministry were well pleased at her fast Sailing," and with regard to the latter that "this brig is the most beautiful & most compleat vessel ever seen by O'Brien" (referring to himself in the third person).[106] The report also mentioned the positive impression these ships made on the Algerians: "the Algerines were captivated with those vessels . . . & from this sample of American construction . . . the Algerines are convinced that we have

[103] Richard O'Brien, "Particulars Relative to the Affairs of the United States of America at Algiers Commencing in Feb[ruary] to the End of March 1799," *Naval Documents*, I:292.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Named after a Swedish consul who had helped during the peace negotiations in 1795.
[106] Richard O'Brien, "Particulars Relative to the Affairs of the United States of America at Algiers Commencing in Feb[ruary] to the End of March 1799," *Naval Documents*, I:292.

abilities & resources in the United States to be a very active & stubborn enemy."[107] In this passage, O'Brien clearly felt pride in American craftsmanship. Additionally, he gave credence to his arguments that his previous boasting of American naval might was not mere hyperbole.

Dey Mustafa inquired to know at how much the vessels were valued which O'Brien said he could not answer – principally, because there was no way for him to know. However, shortly thereafter, the *Sophia* finally arrived in Algiers. The consuls Cathcart and Eaton were on board as well as new instructions. O'Brien then also learned at how much the three vessels were valued in Philadelphia. Furthermore, he stated that he became aware of the fact that neither the new dey nor his ministers were aware of certain details of the 1795 peace treaty. In this, O'Brien saw an opportunity to make a profitable arrangement.

O'Brien reported to have felt emboldened by a message to Congress by John Adams in response to the XYZ Affair. Quoting parts of Adams' message, O'Brien reported "I raised my voice & considered myself as the representative of a great, free, powerful, & independent nation."[108] Allegedly influenced by the president's belligerent rhetoric, O'Brien inflated the prices of the vessels and decided to offer two of the vessels in lieu of the stipulated annual naval stores.[109] Additionally, he decided that the *Hassen Bashaw* was to be given without charge. Of course, the inflated prices were compensating for the cost of this supposed present.

Perhaps O'Brien considered John Adams an audience for his report, or maybe he counted on his popularity within the State Department. Either way, as a rare example of O'Brien admitting to having acted emotionally, the invocation of the president's rhetoric reads like a comparatively obvious attempt at flattery. Even if this passage served as a writing strategy, it nevertheless reveals that the defense of US independence allowed for the display of emotions and even bold, impulsive behavior. O'Brien defiantly reclaimed his country's honor by engaging in risky diplomacy.

To veil the exchange in a sense of urgency, O'Brien fabricated extenuating circumstances. He informed the Algerians that the Portuguese had offered to buy the three vessels for $120,000 dollars. Furthermore, he stated that the United States would find "pleasure particularly at present in encreasing the Marine of Algiers in order to crush the French."[110] The

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[107] Ibid., I:293

[108] Ibid., I:293. In the message to Congress, Adams stated "I will never send another Minister to France without assurances, that he will be received, respected, and honored, as the representative of a great, free, powerful and Independent Nation." See John Adams, "John Adams to United States Congress, June 21, 1798," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-2630. Accessed May 1, 2021.

[108] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 98.

[109] The value of the ships can be corroborated in Cathcart's account as well. See Cathcart, *The Captives,* 277.

[110] Richard O'Brien, "Particulars Relative to the Affairs of the United States of America at Algiers Commencing in Feb[ruary] to the End of March 1799," *Naval Documents,* I:294.

latter argument, O'Brien added, was genuine, as he hoped the Algerians would "be the means of our commerce having less obstructions in this quarter [through the French]."[111] For O'Brien it might have been the first time that Americans, too, were the ones manipulating the Barbary States to serve their own interests.

Dey Mustafa accepted the terms of this exchange. O'Brien noted that the arrangement renewed "and secured the peace" with Algiers.[112] He thus effectively exchanged the vessels for two years and nine months' worth of annual naval stores: "O'Brien was giving up three ships but getting much more. He asked the dey for a written receipt and an acknowledgement that the United States was fully paid up."[113] Because the vessels had been built prior to the State Department's recommendations not to acquiesce to demands of armed ships, O'Brien was not even in violation of his instructions. Instead, he had advantageously repurposed the three ships to avoid the supposed humiliation of annual tribute. Inflating the price also meant that he was able to present Dey Mustafa with a gift at virtually no cost.

After the deal was concluded, O'Brien feigned that he feared to be reprimanded by his own government: "I observed that even as the business was settled, that I was afraid of my head with the American Government & hoped if requisite the Dey & Ministry would give me a certificate which woud in some respects plead an excuse for me relative to my Conduct."[114] With this comment, O'Brien likely wished to give the transaction a greater sense of credibility. However, it appears that O'Brien slightly misjudged his own cunning as he described the dey's answer: "Aye Says the Dey, we shoud have a new consul here[,] one that did not so well know the place as you do."[115] O'Brien did not comment further on the dey's reply. And while he framed the entire letter as an enormous diplomatic success for the United States, the dey's response points to the possibility that he was aware that O'Brien had attempted to trick him.

Within the context of the letter, the comment by the dey also further cemented O'Brien's position as a skilled diplomat. Indeed, there are numerous instances within the report that emphasized O'Brien's integrity without claiming it outright. For example, during apparently heated negotiations, O'Brien reported to have said to his opponent that he "well knew I was the Agent of the U:S: not sent here to lavish away, their interests & sacrifice my own character which I held in as high estimation as my life."[116] Many such details about the negotiations

[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Allison, *The Crescent Obscured*, 162.
[114] Richard O'Brien, "Particulars Relative to the Affairs of the United States of America at Algiers Commencing in Feb[ruary] to the End of March 1799," *Naval Documents*, I:294.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., I:292.

provided entirely unnecessary information for the State Department but instead served to credit O'Brien for the successful negotiations. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the State Department was able to extract any meaningful intelligence from many of these lengthy, self-congratulatory passages. This style of writing might be argued to resemble Cathcart's attempts at gaining recognition for his diplomatic efforts in *The Captives* and *Diplomatic Journal*, though O'Brien's prose was far more sophisticated and subtle.

Aside from relatively inconsequential maritime disputes, the issues previously discussed may regarded as typical subjects of the consular reports written by Richard O'Brien. By and large, these were written in a disinterested and seemingly neutral fashion. When there were issues on which he conceived himself educated, he would give his opinion and advice to the State Department. Other than that, O'Brien was seemingly concerned with simply managing the diplomatic affairs of the United States to the best of his ability.

There is little evidence that indicates veneration of national symbols such as the flag or the universally acclaimed George Washington – even after news of his death arrived on the Barbary Coast. For the most part, O'Brien presented himself as emotionally detached from such issues. Instead, he presented himself as in control of his passions, retaining his personal honor as a gentleman by doing so. When reporting on the successful negotiations, however, O'Brien did include self-congratulatory passages that seem to revel in his diplomatic skills. These can be interpreted as an appeal to gain some form of recognition and continuously reaffirm his rank as part of a political elite. Interestingly, the vocabulary of national honor appeared less frequently in O'Brien's correspondence when compared to his peers.

**A Study in Nationalism: William Eaton in Tunis**

In Tunis, the situation was different. Unlike his colleague in Algiers, William Eaton regularly invoked the notion of *national* honor in the correspondence with both his peers and the State Department. In part, this may be explained by Eaton's experience as a career soldier who had no prior experience in the field of diplomacy, let alone the more delicate task of negotiating with rulers of the Barbary States. Observing the cultural chasm between these predominantly Muslim autocracies and the newly founded republican and moreover secular United States often led Eaton to express himself in highly emotionally charged language. Additionally, Eaton regularly compared the United States to other European countries. Much of his commentary centered around the notion that the symbolic submission to the Barbary States constituted shameful behavior which was described as highly detrimental to the honor of the United States.

When William Eaton arrived in Tunis on March 12, 1799, he was accompanied by James Cathcart. The two were instructed to renegotiate the details of certain articles from the peace treaty that had been drafted by a French merchant named Joseph Etienne Famin a few years earlier. Famin had acted on the behest of Joel Barlow who was then in Algiers. The Senate had ratified the treaty overall but had refused to consent on a number of key issues. The two consuls were now given the task of convincing the Bey of Tunis to approve of the changes.

The first point of contention was article 14 of the treaty. It set a tariff of three percent on Tunisian goods imported into the United States as well as on American goods imported to Tunis. While this provision was therefore based on reciprocity, it posed a serious problem for the American commercial system. In fact, the article threatened to invalidate the entire system of generating revenue for the United States. The instructions to the consuls explained the issue thusly:

> The revenue of the United States arises chiefly from duties on goods imported. These duties generally exceed ten per cent. They are imposed on our own merchants, and increased on the merchants of foreign nations. Our treaties with those nations stipulate that no higher duties shall be paid by their subjects than by those of the most favored nation. Consequently, if this article in the treaty with Tunis should be ratified by the American government, the duties on all the goods imported into the United States by the subjects of those foreign nations must be reduced to three per cent.[117]

To avoid such a reduction, the only options were either to change all the existing treaties that had already been negotiated with commercial partners of the United States or to nullify the article in the treaty with Tunis. The latter option was of course regarded far more practical.

Another issue arose around the firing of salutes upon the occasion of American ships coming to port. The treaty stipulated that vessels were to fire a salute which was to be returned shot for shot. For each shot thus fired, a donation of one barrel of gunpowder was to be given as reimbursement to Tunis by the incoming ship. This article was reciprocal in theory, but in practice it only affected the American side. It was pointed out in the consular instructions that "Tunisian vessels of war would probably never enter the ports of the United States, while the vessels of war of the latter are likely often to enter the ports of Tunis, [therefore] to stipulate for the donation of a barrel of powder for every gun . . . was to authorize the levying of a contribution in a way not very honorable to either side."[118] Notably, the idea of honor was

[117] John Adams to Richard O'Brien, William Eaton, James Cathcart, "Full Powers," not dated, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[118] Ibid.

explicitly mentioned as a motivation to change this article in the instructions issued by the president, and it also featured heavily in the negotiations.

Three days after their arrival in Tunis, Eaton and Cathcart were granted an audience by Hamouda ibn Ali, the Bey of Tunis. The issue of gunpowder and salutes was the very first topic brought up by the bey. He inquired why there were no salutes fired when the two consuls had arrived. They immediately resorted to lying. In Eaton's diplomatic journal, the answer is noted as follows: "we were unacquainted with the customs. (True cause, we did not chuse to demand a salute which would cost the United States eight hundred dollars.)"[119] Clearly, the consuls were determined to follow their superior's instructions to the letter.

A few days later, the article that specified the salute was discussed. The two consuls made their case against having to reimburse the gunpowder for salutes. They argued that "it was unprecedented in any of his treaties with other nations, it would be humiliating to us to agree to it, and not very honorable in him to demand it."[120] When the bey still refused, the two repeated their concerns more forcefully: "We told him the concession was so degrading that our nation would not yield to it: both justice and honor forbade: and we did not doubt but the world would view the demand as they would the concession."[121] While the two statements did not fundamentally differ in their content, the phrasing clearly presented the notion of honor and humiliation as inextricably linked.

Furthermore, the international comparison (and implied hierarchy) was invoked as an argument to further highlight the supposed humiliation inherent in conceding to the article under discussion. Such humiliation, the consuls argued, stemmed from the knowledge that other nations were not subject to similar demands. Furthermore, the reference to "justice" might have constituted an appeal to some loosely defined notion of international law, or perhaps precedent, that would be violated if the consuls conceded to the article. In this instance, the logic employed by the two consuls is reminiscent of the arguments espoused by the US political elite roughly one decade earlier. In both cases, the notion honor and justice were presented as being central to foreign policy.

From this standpoint, the United States was perceived to be in a uniquely submissive position. To represent the only country that was obliged to provide reimbursements for salutes was considered a circumstance rendered unacceptable by the consuls. Interestingly, the argument also shows that the Barbary States were not unique in formulating their demands

[119] William Eaton, "Negociation," March 26, 1799, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

based on international precedent. While the rulers of Tripoli and Tunis regularly referenced US concessions made to Algiers as a basis for their demands, this exchange shows that Americans and Europeans, too, were sometimes privy to the details of treaties made with other European countries.[122] This knowledge appears to have been extremely important for the consuls in order to assess their country's international standing at the Barbary coast.

In this case, the idea of hierarchy appears to have taken precedence even over material interest. While the cost of gunpowder certainly was taken into consideration as well (as is demonstrated by Eaton's remark on the matter), sums in the realm of several hundred dollars dwindled in comparison to the lavish consular presents the consuls were forced to give to Barbary rulers on a regular basis. And yet, the consuls made the implied comparative rank of the United States a sticking point on which they were unwilling to compromise. The extensive commentary in Eaton's journal may then be regarded as a testament to the importance with which the consuls regarded their national honor in the realm of Barbary diplomacy – of course, with an emphasis on comparisons to European countries.

Interestingly, the consuls also tried to appeal to the bey's sense of personal honor. They pointed out that it was not honorable for the bey to demand the barrels of gunpowder, alluding to "how the world would view" his behavior. In this, the consuls attempted to convince the bey to take the notion of his personal honor seriously. These appeals mirrored the consular instructions which called the arrangement under discussion "not very honorable on either side."[123] This strategy therefore relied on the assumption that the bey would share the Americans' understanding of what would constitute "honorable" behavior.

However, this strategy proved ineffective. The bey's response to the consuls' overtures is quoted in Eaton's journal thusly: "'You consult your honor,' said he, 'I my interest.'" Clearly, appealing to American and European conceptions of honor in this instance did not produce the intended result. Notably, the bey's response invokes a dichotomy between the concept of honor and interest. This choice of words seems very reminiscent of Thomas Jefferson's rhetoric, when he accused European nations of "counting their Interest more than their Honor."[124] However, these apparent rhetorical similarities must be treated with caution.

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[122] For example, William Eaton included the following in his diplomatic journal: "The Bey expressed chagrin that Algiers and Tripoli had been so liberally complimented with presents, and that himself had been so long neglected." See William Eaton, "Negociation," March 26, 1799, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.

[123] John Adams to Richard O'Brien, William Eaton, James Cathcart, "Full Powers," not dated, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.

[124] Thomas Jefferson, "Report on American Trade in the Mediterranean," December 28, 1790 in Julian P. Boyd ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 44 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–), 18:425. Hereafter referred to as *PTJ*.

There are a few mitigating factors that must be considered when evaluating the bey's statement. Firstly, the extant transcriptions of the interview with the bey were likely written down after the negotiations had taken place. What is more, discussions with Barbary rulers were done with the help of translators (typically referred to as "dragomans") who acted as intermediaries. Under these circumstances, it seems improbable that the Bey of Tunis and the American delegation had comparable assumptions regarding the connotation of their words. Still, it appears as if the Tunisian ruler did not view the somewhat abstract idea of national honor with deference, hence their contention. The Bey of Tunis likely might not have shared the view that national honor and national interest were in some sense mutually exclusive. Under the circumstances, it seems more plausible that Eaton used terminology more familiar to him to describe the bey's arguments.

In this context, the exchange between the consuls and the bey demonstrates the importance of (national) honor on the American side during the negotiations. This was apparent once more during subsequent discussions in which the consuls inquired the following: "Why would you wish to impose on us this humiliating discrimination?"[125] Whereas the United States invoked honor as an argument to refuse terms regarded as shameful, the Barbary States (in this case the Bey of Tunis) were regarded as emphasizing their interests. Protecting US national honor became a sticking point in the negotiations which went unresolved for some time, as their North African counterparts did not share the same cultural assumptions around the concept. This was highlighted by the bey's dismissive response to appeals of his personal honor (and by extension that of the regency under his control).

In the end, negotiations with Tunis still ended amicably. Regarding the issue of tariffs, the Bey of Tunis merely prioritized that both sides were treated equally. At one point he asserted that "he was satisfied the if the duty should be altered to six, ten or an hundred per cent, provided it retained its reciprocity."[126] While the issue of salutes proved to be a contentious debate, the two parties finally agreed that salutes were only to be fired upon request of an incoming ship. Thus, as long as American ships were not demanding salutes upon coming to port, there would not be demands for barrels of gunpowder. Both compromises point to the fact that the negotiations with the bey were most productive when the consuls were able to demonstrate that Tunis would not be disadvantaged financially. Their appeals to the concept of honor among

[125] William Eaton, "Negociation," March 26, 1799, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[126] Ibid.

nations failed. For changing the details of the treaty, the bey referred to one of his ministers who was quick to demand a consular present on the occasion.

Throughout the negotiations, comparisons to European countries were made frequently by both parties. Barbary rulers invoked presents by these countries as precedents for demands. When the Tunisian official called for a new present, it was pointed out by the consuls that the United States had just recently given a present worth $50,000. The Americans received the following response: "'Fifty thousand dollars,' said he, 'is nothing. The Spaniards gave one hundred thousand for the peace, and very valuable presents on hoisting the flag.'"[127] When the Americans refused to give a present, this sentiment was repeated. Eaton noted in his journal that the official "repeated that it was the custom of all nations, and made frequent references to the Spaniards."[128] Broadly speaking, it was recognized that almost all states that conducted trade in the Mediterranean submitted to the demands of the Barbary States. This submission, unsurprisingly, was heavily criticized by William Eaton as shameful behavior.

There are numerous examples of Eaton referencing the supposed humiliations to which these countries were subjected. On the weakness of Denmark, for example, Eaton reported that "Denmark indeed shows frigates here but they come with a white flag of truce at the . . . masthead."[129] With regard to Danish foreign policy, Eaton thus concluded that "it is clear they [the Danes] are not fit precedents for Yankees."[130] Notably, Eaton regarded his own country as superior in spite of the fact that the United States had acquiesced to the demands of the Barbary States without sending any warships into the Mediterranean.

On the naval strength of Spain, Eaton expressed a similar sentiment: "Spain has also frigates at Algiers. But so long as the armies of Spain are conducted by the effeminate spirit of papal superstition they will make no progress against men."[131] Characterizing the people of the Barbary States as "men" (with emphasis) was a noteworthy exception to more widespread tropes in which Muslims were frequently identified as endowed with female characteristics.[132] In this instance, submission to these allegedly barbaric regencies is inferred to be an even greater symbolic emasculation.

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[127] (To hoist the flag at the consular house served to signal peaceful relations between the two countries.) Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] William Eaton to David Humphreys, September 13, 1800, "Letterbook December14, 1799 – June 28, 1801," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[130] William Eaton to Secretary of State, May 7, 1800, "Letterbook December14, 1799 – June 28, 1801," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[131] William Eaton to David Humphreys, September 13, 1800, "Letterbook December14, 1799 – June 28, 1801," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[132] Lawrence Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785–1816* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 139.

Next to Spain, Italy had historically been one of the countries most affected by raids from the Barbary States.[133] As might be expected, Eaton also expressed frustration at the passivity of the Italian states. Regarding the prevalence of Italian slaves in Tunis, he wrote "Naples has a royal kennel full of dogs, a country full of priests, churches of gold – and Barbary full of slaves . . . Ask the wretch to what king he belongs (all slaves here belong to kings) he will say "[I am from] Napoli."[134] Elsewhere, Eaton drew a comparison with the States of Italy thusly: "it would have a good effect to show force in these seas . . . if it were only to convince them that we are not Italians."[135] Clearly, Eaton hoped that the United States would not follow the example of these comparatively weak European states.

These characterizations represented a sharp distinction from, for example, the correspondence of Richard O'Brien. Whereas O'Brien frequently described foreign policy as a delicate process between individual actors (such as European and American diplomats and North African ministers and rulers), Eaton criticized the conduct of entire nations more broadly. Individual honor, though of course acknowledged, was generally presented as subservient to the general good of the country. Throughout his writing, Eaton often expressed his opinion concerning the overall situation instead of focusing on individualized episodes of foreign policy. And even when such exchanges were reported, like the initial negotiations with the bey discussed previously, they were contextualized within the greater framework in which an implied international hierarchy between the United States and European nations was prioritized.

In this context, the unenviable position of European countries presented itself in a myriad of ways. The near-ubiquitous presence of European slaves was perhaps one of the most noticeable examples. Eaton reflected on this situation in his journal shortly after his arrival at the Barbary coast. The entry was written in the form of a sentimental inner dialogue. Beginning with a quotation by the author Laurence Sterne, Eaton wrote the following: "'Slavery! Thou art a bitter draught.' In very deed thou art . . . Say it is God's arrangement and be silent. No! To arrangements like these my heart rebels in spite of fable's gods . . . There can be no heaven for me in sight of positive misery."[136] In this example, his style of writing constituted a deviation from the more boisterous style of writing that was typical for Eaton. This may then be

[133] For a detailed analysis on the history of Italy and the Barbary States, see Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
[134] William Eaton to Secretary of State, December 20, 1800, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 1, NARA.
[135] William Eaton, "Negociation," March 26, 1799, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[136] William Eaton, Remarks Made at Algiers, February 13, 1799, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.

interpreted as Eaton highlighting his aversion to slavery in no uncertain terms. The inability of European countries to end this practice altogether, or, in many cases, to merely redeem their subjects thus added to the sentiment of national shame of European countries.

Interestingly, Eaton also considered the case of the United States in the context of Barbary slavery. Eaton usually criticized the policies of his home country from a position of presupposed affection, even when phrasing his foreign policy advice in highly passionate terms. Yet, he concluded his remarks by writing that "Barbary is hell – So, alas, is all American south of Pennsylvania; for oppression and slavery and misery are there."[137] His reflections on the southern parts of the US constitute a notable exception to the general discourse on Barbary slavery in which comparisons to the United States were quite rare. Furthermore, Eaton's melancholic style deviated from the otherwise aggressive tone of his correspondence. Unlike other topics, it seems as if human bondage, for Eaton, was an exceptionably cruel practice which allowed for the display of emotional and somewhat somber language.[138]

Another aspect that Eaton frequently characterized as shameful and submissive behavior was the well-established tradition of giving consular presents. Unlike Cathcart and O'Brien, who had a decade-long experience with Barbary diplomacy, Eaton had not been as familiar with this custom, when he first arrived in North Africa. Shortly after his arrival in Tunis, Eaton made some observations regarding the issue in a letter to the secretary of state:

> Those ancient religious rites, marriage ceremonies, abductions, domestic habits, and even agricultural management (which probably must have descended from the ancient Egyptians) are preserved here with little deviation and less improvement. But no custom of the Orientals seems more minutely preserved than that of giving and receiving presents. This custom seems to have been very ancient not only on the reception of an embassador but also on the meeting of friends on formal visits . . . What is now considered in Europe and America corruption was then no more than a matter of course, and is now thus received by the descendents of the eastern nations.[139]

In this instance, the custom of giving presents was not only strongly condemned, Eaton also contextualized the issue within a broader context that described Tunisian society as backward and stagnant. This representation stood in contrast to the supposedly enlightened European countries as well as the United States which are claimed to have surpassed these antiquated forms of diplomacy, at least when negotiating among themselves.

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[137] Ibid.
[138] In fact, Eaton once redeemed a female slave that was abducted in Italy. See Richard Zacks, *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 8.
[139] William Eaton to Secretary of State, June 15, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 1, NARA.

Notably, Eaton singled out the custom of giving presents despite the fact that it was in some sense only an extension of the Barbary system of tribute more generally. More broadly, presents constituted a fundamental aspect to diplomacy with any Muslim country. And yet, Eaton criticized the practice in no uncertain terms by not only referring to it as "corrupt" but also in accusing Christian nations of having "been stupid enough to let it become usance, Law of Nations here. – And Americans must submit to it; or aim to resist it."[140] This prompts the question of why this aspect to Barbary diplomacy spawned so much criticism. Why did William Eaton not regard gift-giving as a legitimate means of diplomacy at the Barbary Coast?

Part of the answer was provided by Eaton himself; he described the custom as antiquated and corrupt by European standards. A further explanation for Eaton's vitriolic contempt may be that the act of gift giving, when understood as a ritual, continually reinforced the power imbalance between the gift giver and receiver. Following David Kertzer's definition in his seminal work, *Ritual, Politics, and Power*, rituals must be regarded as "symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive."[141] Through rituals, according to Kertzer, "authority is dramatized and thereby glamorized. This dramatization not only establishes who has authority and who does not; it also defines the degrees of relative authority among the political influential."[142]

The act of gift giving thus epitomized the relationship between tributary countries and the Barbary States. For Eaton, it continually reinforced the notion that the United States was subservient to Tunis. But in presenting Barbary rulers with lavish gifts, this dynamic was not merely hidden in the provisions of written treaties. Eaton, the diplomatic representative of his country, had to perform what he deemed a submissive act, thus making the humiliation of his country visible and palpable both to himself as well as any other persons and in his vicinity, i.e. European diplomats and the inhabitants of Tunis. Moreover, the practice deviated substantially from what had been established diplomatic practice between European countries which presumed equality between nations, even if they differed in size or military might.[143]

There were only two countries who were regarded as generally exempt from having yielded to the depredations of Barbary. Eaton once referred to these as "those powers of Europe which have behaved with dignity here [Tunis]."[144] The first was the United Kingdom which, it

[140] Ibid.
[141] David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1988), 9.
[142] Ibid., 104
[143] Ute Frevert, *Die Politik der Demütigung: Schauplätze von Macht und Ohnmacht* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2017), 152
[144] William Eaton to David Humphreys, September 13, 1800, "Letterbook December14, 1799 – June 28, 1801," William Eaton Papers, HL.

was generally believed, was not subject to the humiliating demands of the Barbary States. In one of his consular reports, Eaton commented on Britain's reputation thusly: "they have the mediation of Great Britain through admiral Nelson, who is here considered the Neptune of these seas."[145] Despite the recent rivalry between the United States and the British, it appears that Eaton still greatly respected the United Kingdom as having preserved their dominant status in the Mediterranean.

Indeed, Britain's reputation in the Mediterranean was exceptional. After the English consul explained to William Eaton that he had given the bey a present upon his arrival (as was custom), Eaton recorded in his journal that he did not believe that this was a sign of British submission. Instead, he commented: "But Tunis trembles at the voice of England. This then must be a political intrigue of England to embarrass the other mercantile Christian nations."[146] In this instance, Eaton did not seem to entertain the possibility that even Great Britain might in some form be tributary to the Barbary States.

While the United Kingdom was at times in the position to influence the foreign policy of the Barbary States, there were also periods when British diplomats were forced to present Ottoman rulers with presents.[147] Eaton's comments may thus be interpreted as both a testimony to his ignorance on British-Tunisian relations as well as his firmly Eurocentric worldview in which Great Britain constituted an unrivaled world power. And since the act of giving presents constituted a violation of one's honor (if done involuntarily), Eaton immediately suspected that the British were covertly acting against the interest of their commercial rivals.

Given the seemingly influential position of the United Kingdom, William Eaton hoped for the US to obtain a similar status on the Barbary Coast. To convey this idea, Eaton reported to have regularly met with the English consul during the negotiations with the Bey of Tunis: "They are at present seriously concerned thro' fear that the English and Americans are in an offensive & defensive alliance . . . and I have sought to cherish it by taking occasion of being seen frequently with the English Consul, dining with him, and holding secret intercourse."[148] There is, however, little evidence that this strategy had any meaningful effect on the

[145] William Eaton to Secretary of State, June 15, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 1, NARA.
[146] William Eaton, "Negociation," March 26, 1799, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[147] For an extensive discussion on British-Ottoman relations with respect to gift giving, see Michael Talbot, *British-Ottoman-Relations, 1661–1807: Commerce and Diplomatic Practice in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), 105–140.
[148] William Eaton, "Negociation," March 26, 1799, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.

negotiations, although Eaton's behavior once more shows that most Americans believed they could easily manipulate the rulers of the Barbary States.

A second strategy employed by Eaton was to allude to America's military victory over the British. At one point, Eaton noted that he had cited the American Revolution as an argument in his favor but was disappointed: "When I observed to the Bey at one of our interviews that we had once whipped the English, he shrewdly asked whether we did it or whether the French did it for us?"[149] As can be seen by the bey's reaction, this strategy, too, was not effective. The bey's response already indicates that France was the second country that was widely perceived to command respect on the Barbary Coast. And given the Quasi-War with France, convincing the bey of an alliance between the United States and France would have been a futile endeavor.

Furthermore, William Eaton was himself highly Francophobic, a fact of which he made no secret throughout his correspondence. The treaty with Tunis had been negotiated by a French merchant who, it was suggested in the consular instructions to Eaton, had possibly inserted the objectionable articles to further his own commercial ambitions.[150] Against the backdrop of ongoing hostilities against France, Eaton suspected that French intrigues were standing in the way of peaceful relations with the Tunis.[151] By the end of 1799, Eaton summarized the inception of American-Tunisian relations thusly: "The pretended influence of Algiers in behalf of the United States to compel Tunis to negociate a peace was a French project, and was one link in a chain of duplicities and frauds prepared to circumvent the government of the United States."[152] Once more, Eaton did not present the supposed intrigues of the French merchant as an individual act to further one merchant's personal business, but instead Eaton alleged an intrigue by the nation of France.

His personal bias notwithstanding, Eaton still recognized that France enjoyed greater autonomy when compared to the United States. While nominally opposed to all of France's ambitions during the Quasi-War, Eaton nevertheless viewed France's conduct at Barbary as one of the two commercial countries in the Mediterranean that were worthy of imitation: "We must no longer quote, for authorities, the smaller nations of Europe . . . If we must copy, why

[149] William Eaton to Secretary of State, June 15, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 1, NARA.
[150] Regarding the questionable articles of the treaty with Tunis, Secretary of State Timothy Pickering warned Eaton that "Mr. Famin being a Merchant might expect to derive great commercial advantages from the direct trade he might carry on to the United States." See Timothy Pickering to William Eaton, "Private Instructions," December 20, 1798, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[151] Furthermore, Eaton also regularly expressed highly antisemitic sentiments in his letters and often suspected Jewish intrigues as well. For a more thorough analysis of William Eaton's antisemitism, see Lawrence A. Peskin, "American Exception? William Eaton and Early National Antisemitism," *American Jewish History* 100 (2016).
[152] William Eaton, "Recapitulation," December 8, 1799, William Eaton Papers, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," HL.

not chuse originals of fair character? I am for creating a ground of Amity with these Regencies on the base of power. This resort has succeeded with England and France."[153]

For William Eaton, the notion of national honor was a central component of Barbary diplomacy. Throughout the negotiations, the status of the United States – particularly in comparison to other countries – remained a point a contention. Even after the negotiations were concluded successfully, Eaton regularly referred to the principle and vocabulary of national honor to frame his foreign policy advice. Within the framework of international relations, Eaton perceived only two countries as having preserved their honor. These were the United Kingdom and France. All other less powerful countries were regarded as having submitted to the whims of Barbary rulers. This included the United States, although Eaton frequently favored the pursuit of a foreign policy to change this situation.

**Personal Honor and Foreign Policy: James Cathcart in Tripoli**

Diplomatic relations between the United States and the regency of Tripoli proved to be relatively uneventful between 1798 and 1800. Two themes dominated the diplomatic correspondence during this period. For one, the Bashaw of Tripoli repeatedly expressed his desire to be treated as an independent ruler ever since the United States had relied on the mediation of the Dey of Algiers when the treaty was negotiated. Some scholars have argued that this was a contributing factor in the decision to ultimately declare war on the United States in May of 1801.[154] Secondly, there is evidence to suggest that James Cathcart's work as a diplomat was impeded by his personal quarrels with his superior, Richard O'Brien. To provide some historical context, this section will first address the circumstances during which the treaty with Tripoli was negotiated. This is followed by a discussion on James Cathcart's brief tenure as consul to Tripoli.

Richard O'Brien inaugurated US-Tripolitan relations as the first American diplomatic official to make contact with the Bashaw of Tripoli. However, the circumstances of their meeting were far from cordial. O'Brien was on board the brig *Sophia*, carrying tribute to Algiers, when he was captured by Tripolitan cruisers in 1796. Briefly, the ship and its cargo were considered a legal prize, as no treaty with Tripoli existed at the time. However, O'Brien was able to convince the Tripolitans that the freight of the *Sophia* was intended for the dey, and

[153] William Eaton to William Smith, January 17, 1801, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 1, NARA.
[154] See Kola Folayan, "The Tripolitan War: A Reconsideration of the Causes," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 27 (1972).

he was subsequently released. He proceeded to sail to Algiers, delivered the tribute, and accounted for his absence.

Later that year, O'Brien recorded the dey's response to the belated arrival of the tribute in his journal. He reported that the Dey of Algiers was greatly angered by the captain who seized O'Brien's ship and therefore demanded that the Bashaw of Tripoli "cut off his head . . . should the [bashaw] not execute the Dey's will in this, he will give orders to the Captains of his Corsaires to cut off that Captains head wherever they shall find him at sea."[155] While there is no evidence that the bashaw acquiesced and had the captain executed, the dey's demands clearly show that Algiers was perceived to be the most powerful of the three regencies.[156] The letter also reinforced the view that the Dey of Algiers was a de facto superior of both the Bashaw of Tripoli and the Bey of Tunis. Americans concluded that the dey's mediation and guarantee would ensure peaceful relations with the remaining Barbary States.

At least briefly, the superiority of Algiers was acknowledged by the bashaw. In November of 1796, O'Brien returned to Tripoli, now acting as an official diplomat with the sanction of Joel Barlow, to negotiate a peace treaty. He reported to have repeatedly invoked the Dey of Algiers as a guarantor of the peace during interviews with the bashaw. In fact, he appears to have mentioned Algiers so often that he merited criticism by one of his fellow diplomats. He noted in his journal that the Spanish consul advised him "to try to prevent the reference to Algiers."[157] These comments indicate that it was perceived imprudent by more seasoned (European) diplomats to rely on Algiers in negotiations with the remaining Barbary states.

In the end, the bashaw agreed to a peace treaty: "He said agreeable to the request of the Dey of Algiers I am at peace with the Americans, that the Dey of Algiers had demanded this favour for the Americans, that even if no money had been sent he would have complied."[158] The bashaw consented to comparatively lenient terms in the treaty. There were no stipulations for annual tribute, and the sum of money (to be paid in cash and presents) the bashaw was supposed to receive was far smaller than what was paid to Tunis and Algiers. The superiority of Algiers was enshrined in article 12 of the treaty which stated that, in cases of dispute, "an

[155] Richard O'Brien, "Remarks and Observations relative to the affairs of the United States of America and their obtaining a Peace with the Bashaw of Tripoli," November 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 3, NARA.
[156] According to H.G. Barnby, the renegade Peter Lyle commandeered the cruisers that captured the *Sophia*. If this was the captain in question, then the bashaw refused to order his execution. Lyle was one of the highest ranking naval officers in the Tripolitan fleet and continued to serve during the first Barbary War. See Barnby, *The Prisoners of* Algiers, 296–297.
[157] Richard O'Brien, "Remarks and Observations relative to the affairs of the United States of America and their obtaining a Peace with the Bashaw of Tripoli," November 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 3, NARA.
[158] Ibid.

amicable referrence shall be made to the mutual friend of the parties, the Dey of Algiers, the parties hereby engaging to abide by his decision."[159] The most likely explanation for the leniency on these points remains, as some scholars have suggested, that the bashaw did not wish to further antagonize the Dey of Algiers.[160]

The treaty with Tripoli also stands out in another way. It referenced the United States as a secular country. Article 11 of the treaty read as follows:

> As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion, – as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen, – and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.[161]

While the often-cited first part of the article might give reason to suspect that Joel Barlow (the treaty's author) primarily wished to reinforce the idea of the United States as a secular republic in foreign policy out of some high-minded idealistic motivation, the broader context makes this interpretation improbable. It is more likely that Barlow included this provision for strategic reasons. The Barbary States' rationale for preying on European countries was nominally founded on the struggle between Christianity and Islam. As such, it pitted European Christian monarchies against the predominantly Muslim states of the Barbary Coast. Conveniently, the United States had only recently been founded on the principle of secularism. To Barlow, this presented an opportunity to differentiate the United States from the Christian countries of Europe.

To present the United States as different from Europe was an important aspect to Barlow's general policy. In a lengthy report to the secretary of state, he explained the effect of his strategy with regard to Algiers: "the Dey and other great Turks in this place . . . do not consider us Christians. They know we have no wooden saints, nor ornaments in our churches, that we never roasted any Moors, never joined in a crusade or any other war against the Musselmen."[162] Barlow reasoned that the distinction between the United States and European countries would secure peaceful relations with the Barbary States. Against this backdrop, it seems highly likely that Barlow simply wished to reproduce this distinction in Tripoli.

Moreover, the treaty did not cause any noteworthy controversy in the United States. Despite the integration of article 11, "this was a treaty negotiated by an agent of the federal

[159] "Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed at Tripoli," November 4, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:179.
[160] Barnby, *The Prisoners of Algiers*, 267.
[161] "Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed at Tripoli," November 4, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:178.
[162] Joel Barlow to Secretary of State, October 18, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 2, NARA.

government, presented by the president of the United States to the Senate, which, after due deliberation, had ratified it with a two-thirds vote."[163] Remarkably, despite wide-spread publications of the treaty in newspapers, article 11 "elicited almost no public comment."[164] However, there is also no evidence to suggest that any Barbary ruler treated the United States differently because of the secular form of government.

At the beginning of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the bashaw's grievances were not rooted in the 11th but in the 10th article of the peace treaty, if only because the United States did not adhere to its stipulations. In it, it was stated that all necessary payments for the peace had been made, "except such part as is promised on the part of the United States to be delivered and paid by them on the arrival of their Consul in Tripoly, of which part a note is likewise hereto annexed."[165] The treaty was formally signed in November of 1796. Afterwards, the regency of Tripoli was neglected by the United States for almost two and a half years.

Throughout this interim period, there were repeated instances in which American officials were warned that the Bashaw of Tripoli was growing impatient. In September of 1798, for example, the bashaw personally wrote to Richard O'Brien and congratulated him on his appointment as consul general. However, the letter also included a complaint about the consular situation in Tripoli, stating "I am at a loss to know the reason the American Nation have so long neglected Tripoli . . . but I sincerely hope [the Americans] will not neglect me much longer."[166] The American chargé d'affaires in Tripoli, Joseph Ingraham, likewise warned the State Department that the US should not place their trust in the guarantee of the Dey of Algiers. Since Dey Hassan had died in May of 1798, the bashaw no longer considered Algiers to be the guarantor of the peace treaty. Ingraham warned that the American peace "should be held separately with each regency" and that the bashaw was no longer under any "restraint or fear of the Dey of Algiers, and only respected him as a nabouring Prince."[167] He concluded that war was imminent if no change in policy was to occur soon.

James Cathcart finally arrived on the shores of Tripoli some two months after Ingraham had written the letter. However, he was then told to remain aboard his ship, because he was not allowed to enter the city and would not be received as consul. In his diplomatic journal, Cathcart chronicled the initial negotiations in detail. After his arrival on April 5, 1799, it took Cathcart

[163] Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 240.
[164] Ibid.
[165] "Treaty of Peace and Friendship, signed at Tripoli," November 4, 1796, *Naval Documents*, I:178.
[166] Joseph Ingraham to David Humphreys, July 19, 1798, *Naval Documents*, I:292–293.
[167] Joseph Ingraham to Secretary of State, February 9, 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:297.

almost a week of back-and-forth messaging before he was able gain recognition as the consular representative of the United States by the bashaw. Similar to the previous descriptions of his feud with Richard O'Brien, Cathcart continued to focus on himself as the victim of external intrigues in his writings. Routinely, he emphasized instances in which he felt himself humiliated on a personal level or expressed frustration over the lack of recognition for his diplomatic achievements.

The bashaw's refusal to receive Cathcart as consul rested on the assertation that the United States had failed to meet the stipulations of the peace settlement. This was partially true. The ship *Hero*, which had carried naval stores destined for both Tripoli and Tunis, was presumed to have been lost at sea.[168] Since these naval stores were to be delivered upon the arrival of the American consul, this represented a direct violation of article 10 of the peace treaty. Moreover, the bashaw insisted on receiving the brig *Sophia* as a gift, claiming the ship had been promised to him by Richard O'Brien as an informal part of the peace agreement. Arriving two years late, with neither authorization to give away the ship nor naval stores at his disposal, Cathcart appeared empty-handed.

Richard O'Brien's alleged promise to hand the bashaw the brig *Sophia* was the main point of contention. The ship had briefly been in the possession of the Tripolitans when it was captured in 1796. The bashaw had since expressed interest in obtaining it. Richard O'Brien had commented the following on the issue: "In [the] Treaty you will find there is no Corsair Stipulated; it is true the bashaw wanted the Brig *Sophia*, but he did not get her, and I made him no promise of any Corsair."[169] O'Brien wrote this to the US chargé d'affaires in Tripoli some six months before Cathcart's arrival on the Barbary Coast. While this might be regarded as a convincing piece of evidence that O'Brien did not make the promise, it remains a possibility that O'Brien simply lied and effectively passed on responsibility to whoever would eventually become consul to Tripoli. At the time, O'Brien was in the process of establishing his reputation as a skilled diplomat after a decade of slavery in Algiers. Making informal promises in the course of negotiations was certainly nothing unusual, and Barbary rulers frequently received gifts to facilitate agreements. Against the backdrop of a predominantly negative image of

[168] The *Hero* had sailed for the Barbary Coast around the same time when a convoy had carried Cathcart and Eaton across the Atlantic in early 1799. However, a leak was detected which caused the ship to go on a detour to the West Indies for repair. After repairs had been made, the ship attempted to sail for the Barbary Coast but yet another leak was found, and the ship had to make a stop in New York. All of this caused a considerable delay, and the *Hero* did not arrive in Tunis until April 12, 1800 – over one year after the consuls' arrival. See James Cathcart, "Journal of James L. Cathcart, U.S. Consul, Tripoli, 28 February to 13 April 1799," *Naval Documents* I:308, Secretary of State to Richard O'Brien, January 15, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:347–348, and William Eaton to Secretary of State, April 14, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:354.

[169] Richard O'Brien to Joseph Ingraham, July 12, 1798, *Naval Documents*, I:252.

Barbary rulers as corrupt autocrats, it might have seemed unlikely to O'Brien that the bashaw would seem credible on the issue – at least in the eyes of Americans.

Alternatively, the bashaw might also simply have lied about the promise. Given the arrival of a new consul, this might have been an attempt to extort the ship in which he was already interested by exploiting the legitimate grievances that existed (e.g. the belated arrival of the consul). Similarly, the issue might have been a misunderstanding caused by the language barrier. After all, many of the negotiations were conducted with the help of translators, and the two conflicting parties hardly ever spoke without intermediaries who might have distorted or misconstrued something as a concession where there was none.

Whatever might have been the case, it was unfortunate for the negotiations that it was Cathcart who arrived in Tripoli to be consul, and that it was O'Brien who was alleged to have made the promise to the bashaw. The relationship between the two consuls had at this point already become characterized by suspicion and hostility. But while the rivalry had previously existed mainly in personal terms, the conflict now affected their conduct as diplomats more directly as well.

Cathcart at no point in the journal expressed any doubt that O'Brien had made the promise to the bashaw. In his diplomatic journal, he referred to his former colleague as the "lying dog O'Brien."[170] In a letter to the bashaw, he furthermore stated that the government of the United States "was never acquainted that any promise of the Brig had ever been made."[171] With assertions such as these, Cathcart thus undermined O'Brien's legitimacy as a diplomat while emphasizing his own. Such contradictory messaging stood in contrast to all ambitions by the State Department to pursue a coherent foreign policy with regard to the Barbary States.

What is more, Cathcart did not cooperate with O'Brien. When Cathcart was initially refused to enter the city, he was informed that he was free to leave and that the bashaw would wait forty days before sending out his cruisers to prey on American commerce. This would have been sufficient time for Cathcart to return to Algiers and coordinate a response or invoke the mediation of the Dey of Algiers (as specified in the treaty). Cathcart's refusal to do so directly violated his consular instructions which ordered him to consult the consul general for advice in cases of dispute.

In the end, Cathcart was able to convince the bashaw to accept cash payments in lieu of the naval stores and the promised ship. When the negotiations were formally concluded, the

[170] James Cathcart, "Journal of James L. Cathcart, U.S. Consul, Tripoli, 28 February to 13 April 1799," *Naval Documents*, I:308.
[171] Ibid.

bashaw once more insisted that "we were now at Peace and if the United States of America were disposed to acknowledge him to be a free & independent Prince he was likewise disposed to do them every favor in his power."[172] The bashaw's insistence on Tripoli to be treated as an independent regency is mentioned a total of three times in Cathcart's account of the negotiations, with one more reference discouraging any dependence on Algiers. The bashaw also reiterated this sentiment in a letter to President Adams, noting "we have consummated the Peace which shall, on our side, be inviolate, provided you are Willing to treat us as you do the two other Regencies without any difference being made between us."[173] Clearly, the continuation of peaceful relations with Tripoli was now established on the principle that any arbitration by Algiers was no longer an option despite the treaty's article to the contrary.

After he had succeeded in being recognized as consul, Cathcart began to revert to his personal quarrels almost immediately. His first report to O'Brien started out in an accusatory tone: "When I was at Algiers you gave me to understand that I would have no difficulty whatever to encounter at Tripoli, on my arrival here I found it otherwise."[174] Cathcart furthermore cited "indubitable authority" that O'Brien had promised the *Sophia* to the bashaw.[175] Without providing any details, he also emphasized that he had now satisfactorily concluded the business of the United States in Tripoli.

Cathcart ended the letter by once more asserting the importance of treating all three regencies independently. Speaking for both himself and William Eaton, he asserted that "the interference of the dey of Algiers with either of the other regencies has been detrimental to the affairs of the United States, our Government must drop the Idea of soliciting his mediation . . . both here and at Tunis they are determined to be respected as independant princes."[176] Given the accusatory tone of the letter, this assertion probably contributed to the already strained dynamics between the consuls. Since O'Brien must have been aware of Cathcart's antipathy toward him, this also might have been interpreted as attempt on Cathcart's side to undermine O'Brien's position as consul general and thereby minimize the cooperation between the consuls. It must have been difficult for O'Brien to assess whether Cathcart was motivated by genuine conviction or merely spite because of their personal differences.

In other reports, Cathcart even admitted to have withheld information from O'Brien. In his report to the State Department, Cathcart stated that he did not send him a copy of the

[172] Ibid., I:312.
[173] Bashaw of Tripoli to John Adams, April 15, 1799, *Naval Documents,* I:323.
[174] James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, April 13, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 5, NARA.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Ibid.

negotiations with Tripoli (which included the reference to O'Brien as a "lying dog"): "I do not think it prudent to forward a copy of our negotiations here to O'Brien, as he has too great an opinion of the influence of the Dey of Algiers, which I assure you in respect to this Regency is only nominal."[177] Cathcart added that he feared O'Brien might ask the Dey of Algiers to write a letter to the bashaw if he provided him with the details of the negotiations. This, he feared, might jeopardize the diplomatic relations with Tripoli.

In this instance, Cathcart tacitly admitted that the consuls were no longer cooperating. All three consuls were in effect pursuing their own foreign policies at their respective regency. Cathcart acknowledged in the report that he did not think himself capable of convincing O'Brien to simply refrain from having the dey write a letter to the bashaw – a task that should hardly have been difficult among colleagues who share a common goal. As a result, he chose to violate his instructions once more and excluded the consul general from participating in the diplomatic process with Tripoli altogether.

Instead of cooperating, Cathcart resorted to writing bizarre, passive-aggressive letters to O'Brien in the instances of communication between the two. In one almost comical instance, Cathcart informed O'Brien of the following: "I return you your box of tea or tea leaves; I have been very much deceived by it . . . I opened it and behold it was 'Fair without but foul within.' You will send me as much good tea as I have expended, as it is really a great loss to Mrs. Cathcart, who has not half a pound left."[178] Clearly, the relationship between the two consuls had at this point thoroughly deteriorated to the point where even the feigning of civility was no longer upheld, at least on Cathcart's end.

Throughout the two years of relatively peaceful relations between the United States and Tripoli, Cathcart's attitude did not change. A year after his arrival in Tripoli, Cathcart, in a letter to William Eaton, once more admitted to withholding information concerning the relations between Algiers and Tripoli. Cathcart justified his decision partially by alleging unfounded conspiracies that involved O'Brien and the Jewish bankers of Algiers, stating "I should inform Mr. O'Brien of this transaction but dare not as he informs the Bacri of everything."[179] Cathcart probably withheld further information before and after these instances without being so indiscreet as to admit to such misconduct.

William Eaton, who himself harbored antisemitic sentiments, became gradually convinced by Cathcart's accusations. He would allege that O'Brien was an instrument of Jewish

[177] James Cathcart to Timothy Pickering, April 14, 1799 in *Letter Book*, 24.
[178] James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, April 27, 1799 in *Letter Book*, 29.
[179] (The Bacris were a family of Jewish bankers in Algiers.) James Cathcart to William Eaton, February 17, 1800 in *Letter Book*, 130.

bankers as well and at one point wrote to him "I shall take measures to ascertain whether it be the interest of Government that no public nor private communications shall pass through your hands to me without being inspected by Bacri &c."[180] Unlike Cathcart, Eaton was more careful in formulating this accusation. However, Eaton clearly implied here that he, too, would begin to withhold information from the consul general.

Overall, Cathcart exhibited highly unprofessional behavior during his tenure as a diplomat. As has been shown previously, Cathcart's initial differences with Richard O'Brien were rooted in and expressed through the language of honor. By the time he arrived in Tripoli, this conflict escalated to the point that Cathcart expressed no doubt that O'Brien had promised Tripoli the *Sophia*, effectively siding with the bashaw on the issue. After refraining from cooperating with O'Brien altogether, Cathcart continuously attempted to frame himself as pursuing the interest of the United States and in so doing, contrasted his behavior with that of his alleged opponent whom he described as untrustworthy and disloyal. The escalating rivalry between the two consuls may be interpreted as a result of the repeated humiliations Cathcart reported to have endured previously (for which he blamed O'Brien).

**Honor Through Strength: Shared Conceptions Among the Consuls**

As has been shown, the challenges with which the consuls were confronted were presented in a myriad of ways, making it difficult to describe US foreign policy toward the Barbary States as always consistent, let alone coherent. All three consuls approached diplomacy somewhat differently. Moreover, interpersonal conflicts dominated large parts of their correspondence. These personal differences notwithstanding, all three consuls were unanimous in repeatedly recommending dispatching a naval force into the Mediterranean in order to make an impression on the Barbary States, secure American commerce, and establish the United States as a respectable nation in the eyes of North Africans as well as Europeans. These calls for exhibiting an American fleet in the Mediterranean as means of establishing the United States as a respectable, an *honorable* country may be viewed as a subtle admission that diplomatic efforts to achieve the same end had failed up until this point. As the United States was perceived to be in a uniquely submissive position, all three consuls characterized the show of force as the only remedy to (re-)establish the reputation of the United States as an honorable country. Moreover, two of the three consuls (Cathcart and Eaton) described hypothetical scenarios in which they imagined victories over the Barbary States. These may be regarded as examples in

[180] William Eaton to Richard O'Brien, May 21, 1801, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 2, NARA.

which the humiliations the consuls ostensibly endured led them to overestimate the naval might of the United States.

As has been argued previously, Richard O'Brien's letters and journals were written in a mostly straightforward manner, and he generally refrained from including his personal feelings. Even during his captivity, O'Brien's diary resembled a ship logbook, usually starting with some observations about the weather, followed up by political observations, but he rarely included intimate or personal thoughts.[181] Throughout his role as consul general, O'Brien maintained a similar approach, as he rarely shared private sentiments with his superiors. In this, he differed substantially from the two other consuls who frequently wrote long, emotionally charged letters to each other as well as to the State Department.

Despite these reservations, O'Brien repeatedly urged the United States to adopt a more confrontational strategy with the Barbary States. Even prior to his appointment as consul general, he argued that sending a squadron into the Mediterranean would contribute to "establishing ourselves as a nation to be respected and [having] our friendship solicited: not to be as we are at present robbed and plundered by all those sea robbers of Europe and Barbary."[182] From his perspective, the importance of showing force thus originated in the perception that the United States were frequently treated as a weak and inconsequential actor on the international stage.

Once he took up his position in Algiers, O'Brien reiterated this sentiment. In letters to the secretary of state, he argued that the presence of a naval force in the Mediterranean would act as a deterrent. Since there had never been any American warships near the North African coast, O'Brien feared that the United States were not taken seriously by Barbary rulers: "those people . . . should see that we had some ships of force, to defend and protect our Just Rights."[183] The reputation as a powerful country was thus presented as an important aspect of international relations, as it would ensure peaceful relations with the Barbary States and European countries.

Additionally, O'Brien emphasized the strategic advantage of displaying a naval force in the Mediterranean. Referring to the show of force as a "great and urgent Necessity," he stated that it would be preferable if warships were at all times stationed in the Mediterranean. In cases of "sudden emergencies" these ships could act far more promptly, when compared to situations in which they would have to first cross the Atlantic and arrive much later as a result.[184] Since it

[181] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 41.
[182] Richard O'Brien, "Captain O'Brien's Negotiation in Barbary," June–October, 1796, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 3, NARA.
[183] Richard O'Brien to Secretary of State, April 6, 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:320.
[184] Ibid.

took weeks, sometimes months, for information to reach the State Department, American merchant vessels would remain exposed to North African corsairs for extended periods of time if the navy was not already in the vicinity of the Barbary States.

Once James Cathcart arrived at his post in Tripoli and took on his duties as consul, he also called for a more aggressive policy toward the Barbary States. However, unlike his superior, Cathcart did not attempt to express his opinions as dispassionately. In a report to the secretary of state, he forcefully reiterated the idea that displaying American naval might would change how the United States was perceived, in this case by the Tripolitans:

> These Barbarians say that they have often heard of American Frigates but that they have never seen any, they conclude therefore that we either have none or would rather sacrifice considerable sums than send them into the Mediterranean, but on their seeing them . . . they would conclude that we had resolved to be no longer imposed on & therefore would become more reasonable in their demands.[185]

America's reputation as a powerful country was regarded as the key to changing the nature of the relationship between the United States and the Barbary States.

Calls to demonstrate force as means of implanting the idea of the United States as a powerful country in the minds of North Africans also coincided with the conviction that the Barbary States were inhabited and governed by an inferior people. Cathcart went on to argue that "with Barbarians we must enforce our arguments either with cannon balls or bags of dollars."[186] In repeatedly characterizing North Africans as "barbarians," Cathcart emphasized that they were outside the arena of reasonable diplomacy. According to this view, the presence of the American navy in the Mediterranean was the only appropriate remedy to end the unfavorable treatment of the United States, either by virtue of their presence alone, or through engaging in conflict with the Barbary States directly.

Commenting on the importance of displaying the American fleet, he observed that "had I arrived at Tripoli in [a] United States Frigate I would have concluded our affairs here in a very diff. manner to what I was obliged to do."[187] Notably, Cathcart speculated less about the actual size of the American fleet; instead, the display of a single frigate was thought to advance the *reputation* of the United States as a considerable naval power which, in turn, was regarded as the key to lowering the demands of the Barbary States. This approach was not dissimilar to the

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[185] James Cathcart to Timothy Pickering, August 16, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 1, NARA.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid. Interestingly, William Eaton made a similar observation upon his arrival. Commenting on the impression his ship had made, he lamented "the poor thing excited pity rather than alarm." See William Eaton to Secretary of State, June 15, 1799, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 1, NARA.

so-called "gunboat diplomacy" which was later implemented in the 19th century. According to this philosophy, the mere presence of the US fleet would intimidate the rulers of possibly adversarial powers into subservience.[188]

However, both William Eaton and James Cathcart went beyond merely speculating what impression the display of a naval force would make. In his correspondence, Cathcart advised to engage in naval warfare directly. In December of 1799, he hypothesized that "Capt. Barry & Truxton with the Frigates under their command is a sufficient force to take or sink the whole Marine of Tripoli."[189] He followed up his report with a detailed description on how to breach the harbor and fortifications of the regency, ending his report by remarking "how I should glory to be employ'd on this service if ever their should be occasion."[190]

In fact, Cathcart elsewhere described his participation in this prospective naval campaign in detail. In one report to the secretary of state, Cathcart included his own perspective of how the United States was to respond should the regency of Tripoli capture American vessels:

> Was I to follow the dictates of my own reason I would leave the country immediately & advise our government to send two of our largest Frigates . . . I would join them at Tunis or some other rendezvous & on my arrival in the Bay of Tripoli I would make a formal demand of all the property plunder'd from the United States . . . and 20 or 30,000 dollars as a fine for their presumption, if this was not acceded to immediately I would destroy every Cruizer in their Port which might be done with the greatest ease by the above force.[191]

It is not entirely certain what exactly the secretary of state was supposed to learn from this arguably inappropriate tangent. Far from providing strategic advice on how the fortifications of Tripoli might be circumvented, Cathcart put himself in the position of a naval commander (a rank for which he was hardly qualified). The detailed way Cathcart described his hypothetical victory over Tripoli broke with diplomatic protocol and constituted a notable deviation from the correspondence of other consuls at the time. The only tangible information that could be extracted from this rant was that the United States – with or without Cathcart – could easily defeat Tripoli with little effort.

William Eaton, too, imagined similar scenarios in his correspondence. Whereas both Richard O'Brien and James Cathcart were already more than familiar with diplomatic protocol at the Barbary States, as they had both been captives in Algiers for roughly a decade, the consul

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[188] For further discussion, see, for example, Kenneth J. Hagan, *American Gunboat Diplomacy and the Old Navy, 1877–1889* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Green Wood Press, 1973).
[189] James Cathcart to David Humphreys, December 14, 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:341.
[190] Ibid.
[191] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, July 9, 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:331.

to Tunis had no prior experience in dealing with these regencies. It is perhaps for this reason that Eaton routinely expressed outrage and shock in light of the supposed humiliations the United States had to endure at the North African coast. Of all three consuls, Eaton was by far the most outspoken in his calls for defending American national honor through the show of force. Eaton rarely drafted his reports in a dispassionate fashion or even attempted to write from a neutral perspective. Instead, he opted for long, frenzied letters that in effect served as strongly worded opinion pieces.

Shortly after his arrival on the North African coast, Eaton began to speculate on how a military confrontation between the United States and Tunis would unfold. Like Cathcart, Eaton seemed completely convinced that the US Navy would be capable of forcing the Barbary States (in this case both Tunis *and* Algiers) into submission without much effort: "The whole marine of both kingdoms would hardly give a relish to a british squadron – and would not furnish a breakfast to such force as the United States could without much inconvenience fit out."[192] Notably, Eaton directly compared the United States' potential naval strength to that of the most powerful fleet of the time. Implicitly, Eaton thus reinforced the prescription that the United States should become part of the exclusive league of honorable nations, in this case the United Kingdom.

The report went on in some detail, describing the defenses of the regencies of Tunis and Algiers as well as how these might be penetrated. Eaton's previous experience as a career soldier no doubt influenced his perspective. Like Cathcart, far from merely outlining strategies of maritime warfare, his writings also included highly idealized imaginations of defeating the Barbary States militarily. For example, after a few remarks on Tunis' defenses, Eaton stated that "from these two positions vengeance may be poured upon the city and water batteries below as irresistably and as effectually as the torrent upon Sodom and Gomorrow, and with as much justice."[193] In this case, Eaton suggested that the complete destruction of Tunis (as per the scriptural precedent) would constitute a justified response to Tunisian demands for tribute and consular presents.

The rationale behind calls for establishing a military presence in the Mediterranean (and possibly outright warfare) was routinely linked to an honor-shame dichotomy in Eaton's correspondence. In later letters, Eaton explained the humiliating position of the United States.

[192] William Eaton, "Marine Force of Tunis," not dated, "Letterbook December 18, 1798 – December 9, 1799," William Eaton Papers, HL.
[193] Ibid.

In one instance, he described a downward spiral in which every concession made to Barbary rulers would invariably lead to further demands to the detriment of American honor:

> Why should farther sacrifices be made before we try the experiment of resistance? Humility invites insult. The greater our concessions the more accumulated will be the demands upon us. Nothing can be more absurd than to expect by presents to satisfy the demands of these marauding and beggarly courts, who have no sense of gratitude, no sense of honour, no respect for justice, no restraint from fear, and whose avarice is as insatiable as death."[194]

In this instance, the regency of Tunis was again placed outside the supposedly civilized discourse of international relations which had been established by European countries. As a result, Eaton regarded the use of force as the only solution to put an end to the demands for tribute and presents.

In Eaton's correspondence, the idea of the United States (re-)asserting its status as an honorable country whose rights as a sovereign nation were universally respected in the Mediterranean became inextricably linked to the deployment of the American navy. Eaton further suggested that the show of force alone might be sufficient to induce the desired effect: "America must shew a force in this sea. National interest, honour, safety demand it. The appearance of a few frigates would produce what the whole revenue of a country would not. They would produce impressions of terror and respect. Without force we are neither safe nor respectable here."[195] While Eaton's proposal is certainly expressed with greater emotional appeal, his ideas by and large mirror those of Cathcart with regard to the means and purpose.

In sum, all three consuls urged the State Department to dispatch at least a part of the US fleet to the Mediterranean. Of course, the protection of American trade was an implied objective behind this advice. However, the reputation of the US as a respectable nation became an increasingly relevant factor in which policy advice was contextualized. Whereas Richard O'Brien also took into account the strategic merits of having an American naval force in the vicinity of the Barbary States, both James Cathcart and William Eaton used the rhetoric of national honor in their calls to send US warships into the Mediterranean. Ideally, they argued, the mere display of American warships would make an impression on Barbary rulers and induce them to lower their demands. This would have precluded the use of force.

And yet, both Eaton and Cathcart also provided extremely detailed, fictionalized descriptions of how the US Navy might be utilized in the Mediterranean. These accounts seemed to revel in the prospect of defeating the Barbary States by military means. In this, the

[194] William Eaton to William Smith, July 18, 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:329.
[195] Ibid.

two consuls went far beyond their instructions to simply report regularly on the size of the navy and harbor fortifications in each regency – information that may be regarded as typical military intelligence. (Richard O'Brien, for example, typically submitted this information without further comment.[196]) If anything, the consular instructions reflected a cautionary approach toward potential adversaries of which there were many. Instead, the State Department received extremely optimistic projections of how a military conflict between the United States and the Barbary States would play out.

Surprisingly, it was members of the State Department who initially expressed skepticism about the recommendations formulated by the three consuls. Despite the many assurances that the US Navy would easily defeat the fleets of the Barbary States, Secretary of State Timothy Pickering wrote a letter to William Eaton, inquiring why war had not been an effective strategy for European powers: "The Danes and Swedes have long possessed a naval force vastly superior to what we can exhibit: yet . . . after a display of frigates and some fighting . . . both of those nations have yielded to the humiliating demands of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli."[197] Considering that the system of tribute and ransom had lasted for centuries to the detriment of particularly smaller European countries, this was a valid counter argument. As will be shown, the consuls also massively overestimated the naval strength of the United States. They speculated that the US Navy was capable of fighting *all* of the Barbary States simultaneously during this time. However, the first Barbary War was fought exclusively with the regency of Tripoli and – far from a quick, decisive victory – dragged on for four years.

Remarkably, this exchange between the consuls and the State Department bears a striking resemblance to the debate between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams in the mid-1780s. Back then, it was Jefferson who had been convinced that an American navy would easily defeat the Barbary States and advance America's reputation overseas as a result. Adams had objected that such an endeavor would be connected to substantial costs. Furthermore, he had pointed out that even after a naval campaign by the French, they still had to purchase a peace treaty. In essence, Pickering invoked the same argument (though slightly updated) with regard to Sweden and Denmark. John Adams (now president) and his administration thus retained a skeptical view on the effectiveness of using military force.

In retrospect, it might seem highly paradoxical that the State Department would have the foresight to express these objections from afar, whereas the consuls rarely considered these

[196] Richard O'Brien, "Marine Force of Algiers or a List of Algerine Corsairs on February the 20th 1799," *Naval Documents*, I:300–301.
[197] Secretary of State to William Eaton, January 11, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:343.

complicating factors in their correspondence. After all, the consuls were right at the scene, capable of directly observing the naval strength of the Barbary States at all times which they regularly reported in letters to the secretary of state. In addition, two of the three consuls (James Cathcart and especially Richard O'Brien) were in effect resembling "the new nation's first area studies experts," with extensive prior diplomatic experience at the Barbary Coast.[198] All three consuls had also served in varying capacities during the American Revolution and were thus likely familiar with basic military strategies, and both Cathcart and Eaton evidently perceived themselves qualified to give advice on this topic, since they included as much in their consular reports.

The repeated emphasis on humiliation endured by the consuls – and by extension the United States – may help to resolve this apparent contradiction. The consuls' recommendation for a more aggressive foreign policy appears to have been heavily influenced by their experience on the North African coast which they routinely characterized as shameful and humiliating. Conversely, the only way to restore their personal honor, as well as that of their home country, was to militarily defeat the Barbary States in a grandiose fashion. It seems that the consuls' power fantasies about imagined victories seeped into their consular correspondence, compromising the ostensibly neutral design of these reports. In arguing for the reaffirmation of their country's honor, the consuls greatly overstated the strength of the nascent American navy while at the same time dismissing, or at the very least severely underestimating, the naval forces of the Barbary States.

It remains difficult to assess to what extent the John Adams administration prioritized the consuls' pleas for a greater emphasis on Mediterranean affairs. As one historian has pointed out: "Adams' official and personal correspondence and other papers that were written following his return from diplomatic service abroad contain relatively little material on the Barbary situation."[199] Some scholars have since argued that this supposed neglect of Barbary affairs resulted in the escalation of tensions between the regency of Tripoli and the US which ultimately resulted in war.[200] However, there is some evidence to suggest that the State Department was preparing a greater emphasis on Barbary affairs toward the end of Adams' first term as president. Of course, there was no way for Adams to know there would not be a second until after the election of 1800.

[198] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 212.
[199] James Aloysius Carr, "John Adams and the Barbary Problem: The Myth and The Record," (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1963), 77.
[200] See Kitzen, "Money Bags and Cannon Balls."

**Prelude to War: The *George Washington* Incident**

Back in July of 1799, William Eaton, in his characteristic fashion, called on the United States to show force in the Mediterranean by concluding his consular report with the following appeal: "*Let the government of the United States at last send one ship of war to convoy out the regalia to Tunis that these people may be persuaded that defense grows in our country.*"[201] By 1800, the Quasi-War with France had ended which allowed the government under John Adams to broaden its focus with regard to the relations with other countries. This led the administration to reexamine Barbary relations.

President Adams still begrudgingly accepted to pay off the Barbary States.[202] However, the decision was made to follow Eaton's recommendation and send one warship to Algiers, carrying the annual tribute. The *USS George Washington*, a converted merchant vessel, was fitted out to be the first display of US naval might in the Mediterranean. While the vessel's mission was a peaceful one, the prospect of war was by no means ruled out. To maintain optimal maneuverability, the instructions to William Bainbridge (the ship's captain) explained that the "Vessel is to go to Algiers with a Cargo – but not a full cargo, for she may have an opportunity of performing other Service, besides carrying Cargo to Algiers."[203] Elsewhere, the secretary of the navy reiterated this sentiment more forcefully: "It is not meant that the George Washington shall be loaded as deep as a Merchant Ship – she must be in a condition to fight."[204]

The mission clearly represented a shift toward a more aggressive foreign policy against the Barbary States. It seemed that years of repeated yearning for a show of force on the Barbary Coast were coming to fruition. The instructions to William Bainbridge also echoed earlier advice by the consuls which suggested that a show of force would make a lasting impression on people of Barbary which were supposedly easily manipulated: "While you lay before that city, keep up the strictest discipline, & the most Warlike appearance to make the best impressions of our discipline & power."[205] Clearly, the mission of the *George Washington* was (at least in part) to convey the idea that the United States would no longer be so easily subdued.

[201] William Eaton to William Smith, July 18, 1799, *Naval Documents*, I:329.
[202] In a letter by the Secretary of State to the US Minister to Berlin, John Quincy Adams (John Adams' son), the approach taken by the administration was explained thusly: "[The president] is far from being pleased with the state of our affairs with the Barbary Powers; but he conceives that the engagements of the United States, tho' burthensome, ought to be performed." However, it was also argued that the United States were willing to go to war in the event of the Barbary States breaking the peace. See Secretary of State to John Quincy Adams, July 24, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:364–365.
[203] Secretary of the Navy to William Bainbridge, June 25, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:361.
[204] Secretary of the Navy to Israel Whelen, July 3, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:363.
[205] Secretary of the Navy to William Bainbridge, July 31, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:366.

The *George Washington* arrived off the harbor of Algiers on September 17, 1800. Shortly thereafter, the Dey of Algiers – under threat of war – requested to use the *George Washington* to deliver his own tribute to Constantinople. (While free to pursue a mostly independent foreign policy, Algiers was still formally subservient to the sultan as an Ottoman province.) Captain Bainbridge was initially unwilling to give in to the dey's demand. However, the United States was in a precarious position. As the consul Richard O'Brien explained, the US had already fallen two years behind in paying annual tribute. This, an Algerian minister argued, had already strained the relations with the US and served as a pretext to obtain permission to commandeer the ship.[206]

O'Brien also took into account the international situation. He explained to Bainbridge that Portugal was in the process of negotiating a peace treaty with Algiers. The Portuguese government had already succeeded in ending its wars with both Tunis and Tripoli.[207] Therefore, if Algiers were to declare war, a situation similar to the events of 1793 might unfold, i.e. Algerian cruisers passing through the Straits of Gibraltar and capturing great numbers of American merchant ships in the Atlantic.

Lastly, a failure on Bainbridge's part exacerbated the situation. The *George Washington* had anchored outside of Algiers' harbor but within range of cannon fire.[208] In case the dey were to suddenly declare war, the *George Washington* was at risk to be sunk or at least vulnerable to taking heavy damage. This close, the ship was also at risk of being boarded and declared a legal prize, thus falling into Algerian hands permanently. Captain Bainbridge and his crew of 131 sailors were facing enslavement in such an event.[209]

Taking all these factors into account, Bainbridge decided to acquiesce to the dey's demand and lend his frigate to Algiers. Soon, the *George Washington* was loaded with a variety of animals (among them tigers and antelopes) and boarded by an Algerian diplomatic envoy as well as a number of slaves. In his decision, Bainbridge acknowledged that he went against his instructions which ordered him to behave in a manner "not degrading to yourself, or the flag of the [United] States."[210] In a letter to Richard O'Brien, Bainbridge explained his situation thusly: "Bound by the orders of my government on one hand & viewing the loss of property & slavery

[206] Richard O'Brien to William Bainbridge, October 6, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:374.
[207] Ibid., 374–375.
[208] Kennedy, *The American Consul*, 33.
[209] Richard O'Brien explained the situation as follows: "The Consequence of a positive refusal would be war made immediately by this regency on the U.S., the ship under your Command would be detained, & detention & slavery would be the fate of yourself, officers & crew. The vessels property & citizens of the US would be captured & condemned in this city." See Richard O'Brien to William Bainbridge, October 10, 1800, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 6, NARA.
[210] Secretary of the Navy to William Bainbridge, July 31, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:366.

of our Citizens on the other brings me in a delemma that none can express but those who feel it."[211] On his final decision, Bainbridge commented that "the event of this day makes me ponder on the words INDEPENDANT UNITED STATES."[212]

In his study on the Adams presidency and Barbary relations, historian James Aloysius Carr commented on the situation as follows:

> Viewed from any standpoint, the *George Washington* incident can only be considered as the logical outcome of the course that had been followed by the United States towards Algiers and the other corsair regencies. Since the conclusion of the treaty with Algiers in 1795 the American Government had gone to every conceivable length to satisfy every whim of the piratical rulers.[213]

Thus, while Americans like Captain Bainbridge described this diplomatic episode as humiliating, there is little evidence to suggest that the request was considered exceptionally rapacious by the Dey of Algiers.

Moreover, using foreign ships to carry freight for Algiers was not only "common practice" but even permitted under the terms of the 1795 treaty with Algiers.[214] Article 14 stipulated that "Shou'd the Dey want to freight any American Vessel that may be in the Regency or Turkey said Vessel not being engaged . . . he expects to have the preference given him on his paying the Same freight offered by any other Nation."[215] This article has since been subject to numerous interpretations (and it is contested whether the Dey of Algiers' translation of the treaty was comparable to the English version).[216] William Eaton, for example, referred to the dey's request as "a prodigious distortion of [the] treaty."[217]

This notwithstanding, American diplomats and seamen alike expressed surprise, outrage, as well as sorrow over the request. Shared conceptions of national honor, shame, and humiliation seem to have intensified these sentiments. Captain Bainbridge, in a letter to the secretary of the navy, resorted to familiar Orientalist tropes and called for a greater show of force. Observing the "weakness of their garrisons and the effeminacy of their people," Bainbridge concluded that with "10 or 12 frigates and sloops in those seas, I am well convinced . . . that we should not experience those mortifying degradations."[218] In essence, the consuls'

[211] William Bainbridge to Richard O'Brien, October 9, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:375.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Carr, "John Adams and the Barbary Problem," 95–96.
[214] Fatima Maameri, "Ottoman Algeria in Western Diplomatic History with Particular Emphasis on Relations with the United States of America, 1776–1815," (PhD diss., University Mentouri, Constantine, 2008), 346.
[215] "Treaty of Peace and Amity," September 5, 1795, *Naval Documents*, I:109.
[216] Maameri "Ottoman Algeria in Western Diplomatic History," 347.
[217] William Eaton's Journal, November 10, 1800, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 1, NARA.
[218] William Bainbridge to Secretary of the Navy, October 10, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:379.

appeals for a show of force (of which he himself was already a part) were repeated but on a wider scale.

However, there were other instances in which the expressed sentiment was not assertive outrage. On the day the *George Washington* departed for Constantinople, the vessel's logbook entry also conveyed emotions more akin to sorrow and mourning:

> This day we were big with Expectation of returning to the Land of Liberty . . . at this Instant of Anticipated pleasure we receive a pos[i]tive command from a Dispotic Dey of Algiers that we must be the porters of savage Tygers & more savage Algerine Ambassadors . . . the pendant of the United States was struck and the Algerine Flag hoisted at the Main top Gallant royal mast head . . . some tears fell at this Instance of national Humility.[219]

The submission manifested itself through the powerlessness of the United States to meaningfully establish its independence overseas. Moreover, this sentiment was made visible by having an American ship fly the flag of another nation.

The entry marks a noteworthy exception to the otherwise functional and ostensibly objective nature of logbooks. As Maritime historian Paul A. Gilje has stated: "Wind, wave, and weather. Read any logbook from the great age of American sail and you are likely to see merely a dry record of a ship's journey."[220] Of course, this was no coincident. By design, logbooks were intended to chronicle a ships movement as precisely as possible to reconstruct a voyage afterward. In this instance, however, the circumstances were considered to be sufficiently exceptional to deviate from this established formula of bookkeeping.

Furthermore, the logbook's author likely knew that it would be subject to scrutiny by the State Department, or the Department of the Navy, once the *George Washington* would return to the United States. Bainbridge and his men must have been aware that the voyage on the behest of the Dey of Algiers was certain to cause controversy which would mean that the decision to submit to Algiers would be investigated by the government. From this perspective, the motivation behind this entry might have been to convey to the logbook's reader the involuntary nature of the situation. Though perhaps unlikely, the logbook might also merely have documented a genuine outburst of emotions by some sailors. Whatever may have been the case, this event was considered an appropriate occurrence to deviate from established norms. In this sense, the logbook entry was written to communicate to the reader(s) that the sailors

[219] Entry of October 9, 1800, Occurrences and remarks on board United States Frigate Geo. Washington Commanded by Wilson Jacobs Esq. 1800, June 14 - 1801, Apr. 19, HL.
[220] Paul A. Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor: Maritime Culture in America, 1750–1850* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 65.

were reacting in accordance with the social expectations surrounding this instance of supposed national humiliation.

News about the *George Washington* soon reached the other Barbary consuls. Unsurprisingly, William Eaton described the events as extremely unfortunate. Commenting on the irony of the frigate's failed mission, he asked "Is it not somewhat humiliating that the first United States Ship of war which ever entered the Mediterranean should be pressed into the Service of a Pirate?"[221] In this, Eaton expressed the same melancholy sentiment included in the logbook – namely that any hopes of the United States obtaining some degree of respect at the Barbary Coast were once more disappointed.

For the most part, however, Eaton resorted to expressions of outrage and anger, perhaps more so than ever before. In one instance, Eaton combined a writing style akin to an angry sermon to describe his sentiments:

> Genius of My Country! How art thou prostrate! Hast thou not yet one son whose soul revolts, whose nerves convulse, blood vessels burst, and heart indignant swells at thoughts of such debasement! Shade of Washington! Behold thy orphan'd sword hang on a slave – A voluntary slave, and serve *a pirate*! I never thought to find a corner of this slanderous world where baseness and American were wedded . . . *This is the price of peace!* But if we will have peace at such a price, recall me, and send a *slave* accustomed to abasement, to represent the nation – And furnish *ships of war*, and *funds* and *slaves* to his support, and Our immortal shame – History shall tell that The United States first volunteer'd a *ship of war*, equipt a *carrier* for a pirate – It is written – Nothing but blood can blot the impression out – Frankly I own, I would have lost the peace, and been empaled myself rather than yielded this concession – Will nothing rouse my country![222]

This section, while extensive, captures a plethora of themes expressed at the time to describe the supposed humiliation inherent in acceding to the dey's request to borrow the *George Washington*.

For one, the reference to the "Shade of Washington!" sticks out in this context. The young country's first president had died only a year before in December of 1799. William Eaton had learned of his death just a few months prior to the arrival of the eponymous frigate. Even during his lifetime (and likewise after his death), the place of George Washington as a near universally acclaimed symbol of the United States is difficult to overstate. While the immediate reactions to his death have been discussed previously, the sentiment of humiliation due to the connection between the two events were clearly considered by Eaton in the reference to Washington.

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[221] William Eaton to Secretary of State, November 1, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:398.
[222] Ibid.

Throughout the extract, the theme of slavery and submission remained present as well. Eaton equated the situation of the United States as a whole to that of a slave. At the same time, he exaggeratingly suggested that he, personally, would not continue as consul as long as the demands of Barbary rulers were met in this way. Instead, a literal slave (linked to the notion of "abasement") might take up his position, as no independent person should continue under these circumstances. He further suggested that he personally would have preferred death to giving up the ship. In both the characterizations of the country as well as his own person, the idea of enslavement and shame were presented as deeply connected.

Lastly, William Eaton contextualized his sentiment in a broader context. As has been stated previously, the notion of shame being opposite to honor requires some form of publicity. Eaton lamented that the submission to Algiers would be a recorded fact in history ("History shall tell"), hence exposing this humiliating episode to all of posterity. As usual, Eaton – in congruence with virtually all other Americans who commented on this event – regarded brute force as the only remedy. In this instance, however, there was no mention of any strategic advantage by presenting the United States as a respectable nation through the show of force. Instead, the justification for shedding blood to "blot the impression out" is given in a context in which the United States is thought of as reclaiming its rightful place in history.

The decision to give up the *George Washington* also affected Eaton in a more immediate sense. When the Bey of Tunis learned of the events taking place in Algiers, he cited them as a precedent and demanded to commandeer a vessel as well, in this case to Marseilles. Eaton, however, was able to sway the Tunisians by falsely asserting that the frigate had been bound for Constantinople all along and that it was a "fortunate circumstance" that the Dey of Algiers also wished to send an envoy to the Ottoman capital.[223] He was able to alleviate the situation and reported that "no dishonorable concessions have been yielded to this government."[224] While Eaton resolved the dispute amicably for the United States, the encounter nevertheless proved that decisions made with regard to any one of the Barbary States still often caused ripple effects across the region.

Across the Atlantic, the *George Washington* incident brought back attention to the Barbary States for the first time since the arrival of the American captives in 1797. News of the event arrived in the United States comparatively quickly, and the first newspaper reports were published in December of 1800.[225] For the most part, the press coverage included "either

[223] William Eaton to Secretary of State, December 20, 1800, *Naval Documents*, I:403.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Jason Raphael Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates: Adventures in Sexuality, State-Building, and Nationalism, 1784–1815," (PhD diss., University of California, 2016), 83.

scathing criticism or open letters by O'Brien and Bainbridge trying to explain their conduct."[226] Many newspapers called for retaliation against the Barbary States. At times, sentiments prevalent during the XYZ Affair were reiterated, especially the famous slogan "Millions for Defence; but not a Cent for Tribute," and the call for action transcended political parties, culminating in "a bipartisan consensus [which] craved vengeance against the Barbary pirates."[227]

The publicity surrounding the *George Washington* marked a shift from previous years. Whereas the consuls had been lamenting US submission to the Barbary States within the comparatively discreet realm of diplomacy, the weakness of the United States on the world stage now became more widely known. News surrounding the frigate were not only "soon common talk throughout Barbary" but also forced Americans to contemplate the weak position of the United States.[228] In all, there was near universal agreement among Americans that the decision to give up the *George Washington*, albeit temporarily, was a humiliating and shameful episode in the brief history of the United States. As had been the case previously, the only proposition to compensate for such humiliations was to call for the display of an even greater naval force.

[226] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 114.
[227] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 85, 86.
[228] Macleod and Wright, *The First Americans in North Africa*, 72.

# Part III: War

## Introduction

At around the same time that the crew of the *George Washington* was preparing for the voyage to Constantinople, US-Tripolitan relations began to further deteriorate. As has been shown previously, the Bashaw of Tripoli, Yusuf Qaramanli, had repeatedly insisted that his regency should be treated independently and with the same deference as Algiers and Tunis. This, he had also communicated to the president in a letter dated May 25, 1800. Whereas the wording of the 1796 treaty with Tripoli suggested a subservience to Algiers, the bashaw repeated the sentiment that Tripoli was to be regarded "in the same point of view as the other regencies of Barbary, and to be upon the same footing and importance."[1] Moreover, the bashaw wrote that he hoped this idea would be reinforced "by deeds and not empty words," likely a subtle request for consular presents or even a change in the treaty.[2]

By the end of October, no letters had arrived from the United States, and the bashaw began to threaten war if the president continued to remain silent.[3] In particular, Cathcart noted, the bashaw objected to articles 10 and 12 in the treaty. The former stipulated that no tribute should be paid, the latter that, in cases of dispute, the Dey of Algiers should act as mediator. James Cathcart also reported that the Bashaw of Tripoli had decided to wait another six months for a response to his letter but would declare war against the United States if he did not receive a satisfactory answer.[4] Thus, under the terms of this ultimatum, war might be declared by March or April of 1801.

Richard O'Brien, as consul general, apparently attempted to invoke article 12 of the treaty with Tripoli and appealed to the Dey of Algiers for mediation.[5] However, given the fact that this was one of the points of contention, this approach proved inefficacious. Moreover, the guarantee had been made by Hassan Dey who had died in 1798. While the English version of the treaty did not refer to Hassan Dey by name but rather the "Dey of Algiers" as an institution, scholars have since nevertheless suggested that "the Bashaw viewed Hassan Bashaw's [the

[1] Yusuf Karamanli, "To John Adams from Yusuf Karamanli, May 25, 1800," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-4372. Accessed July 4, 2021.
[2] Ibid.
[3] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, October 18, 1800 in *Tripoli: First War with the United States, Inner History and Letter Book* (LaPorte, Indiana: Herald Print, 1901), 188.
[4] James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, October 25, 1800 in Dudley W. Knox ed., *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with The Barbary Powers*, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1939), I:390. Hereafter referred to as *Naval Documents*.
[5] In a letter, O'Brien stated as much. However, even he seemed to be aware that the chances of success were slim, commenting that "I think the Dey's interference with Tripolia will be by Letter but not to send any force." Richard O'Brien to John Gavino, January 5, 1801. Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 5, National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland. Hereafter referred to as NARA.

former dey] guarantee of the Tripolitan treaty as a personal one that ended with his death."[6] Therefore, the regency of Algiers could do little to interfere with the bashaw's foreign policy.

Throughout the first half of 1801, it became increasingly apparent to the consuls that war with Tripoli was on the horizon. Confronted with the demand of $225,000 to preserve peace as well as $20,000 in annual tribute, Cathcart attempted to explain that he did not possess the authority to amend the existing treaty: "the alteration in the treaty can be made by none but the President of the United States, by & with the consent of the Senate . . . & will take much time," he told the bashaw.[7] This explanation was deemed insufficient. By February, Cathcart drafted a circular letter to all US agents in the Mediterranean, warning that "the Bashaw of Tripoli will commence Hostilities against the U. States of America in less than Sixty Days from this date hereof."[8] Despite some last-minute efforts to bribe the bashaw into waiting for a response by the president, on May 14, the flagstaff in front of the American consular house was chopped down. In Tripoli, this was the traditional means of declaring war against another country. Once again, Cathcart wrote a circular letter in which he announced the news.[9]

There has been some scholarly debate surrounding the motives behind the bashaw's decision to declare war. Kola Folayan's interpretation is perhaps most favorable toward Tripoli in alleging that Americans failed to "assess correctly the political relationship between Algiers and Tripoli."[10] According to this view, the conflict simply resulted from the clauses in the treaty that suggested a dependence on Algiers. Furthermore, Folayan argues that the United States had failed to meet its obligations for some time. For example, James Cathcart had arrived as consul a full two and a half years after the treaty had been signed. There also remained some confusion about the promises made by O'Brien regarding the *Sophia*. Moreover, Folayan of course points to the fact that the Bashaw of Tripoli never received a response to his letter. Due to these circumstances, he concludes that "Tripoli was forced to break diplomatic relations with America and declare war against her on May 14, 1801."[11]

While Folayan correctly points toward mistakes made by American diplomats in handling the relationship with Tripoli, the conclusion that Tripoli "was forced" to declare war seems unwarranted. In addition, the bashaw's demands for $225,000 to uphold the peace and $20,000 in annual tribute go entirely unmentioned in this account of events. The more

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[6] Michael Kitzen, "Money Bags or Cannon Balls: The Origins of the Tripolitan War, 1795–1801," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (1996): 611.
[7] James Cathcart to Supreme Commandant, February 16, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:420.
[8] James Cathcart, "Circular letter to U.S. Agents and Consuls," February 21, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:421.
[9] James Cathcart, "Circular," May 15, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:499.
[10] Kola Folayan, "The Tripolitan War: A Reconsideration of the Causes," *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 27 (1972): 618.
[11] Ibid., 622.

conventional view that "Barbary rulers annulled treaties from time to time in order to bolster their revenue" probably deserves greater merit in this context.[12] After all, the treaty with Tripoli (at least the English version) simply did not allow for sudden declarations of war or unfounded changes.

While it is of course difficult to ascertain the bashaw's exact motives for declaring war against the United States, there are a few circumstantial factors that should be taken into account when discussing this decision. For one, the treaty with the United States was negotiated briefly after Tripolitan cruisers had captured a vessel carrying tribute to Algiers. Thus, the articles in the treaty referring to the Dey of Algiers might have originated out of a desire to avoid further antagonization of Barbary's most powerful regency. Secondly, the Bashaw of Tripoli had ascended to the throne in 1795, after five years of civil war in which he had killed one brother and exiled another.[13] Given his disputable claim to power (which would in fact be used against him in the ensuing war), it might appear that the bashaw – at the time – simply wished to consolidate his power without foreign interference. The United States constituted a largely unknown entity on the Barbary Coast, so it might have been difficult for Yusuf to assess whether or not he would provoke an aggressive naval response if Tripolitan vessels continued to prey on American shipping.

By 1801, however, the situation was different. Yusuf Qaramanli had been in power for over five years at this point. Thus, it would seem plausible that he felt more confident to declare war against a distant country which had steadily expanded its commercial presence in the Mediterranean.[14] What is more, there had never been any indication that the United States would pose a substantial challenge to demands made by the Barbary States. When it came to the reputation of the United States, Barbary rulers knew that Americans had paid handsomely for the redemption of their citizens, had even provided the Dey of Algiers with a complimentary frigate and smaller vessels, and even allowed the use of their own warship (the *George Washington*) to carry tribute to Constantinople. Given this pusillanimous conduct, it seems as if a declaration of war for the extortion of tribute would constitute a fairly reasonable course of action with relatively little risk attached to it.

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[12] Jason Raphael Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates: Adventures in Sexuality, State-Building, and Nationalism, 1784–1815," (PhD diss., University of California, 2016), 92.

[13] For a more detailed analysis of Qaramanli's assent to power, see Kola Folayan, "Tripoli under the Reign of Yusuf Pasha Qaramanli," (PhD diss., University of London, 1970).

[14] Between 1790 and 1800, the value of American commerce had quadrupled. See Brian Loveman, *No Higher Law: American Foreign Policy and the Western Hemisphere since 1776* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 12.

Lastly, it has also been suggested that Yusuf Qaramanli simply wished to elevate his regency's international standing. He "had declared to all the European countries concerned through their resident consuls his intention to make Tripoli enjoy the same international respect accorded to Algiers."[15] Fighting a war against a country that was perceived to be easily coerced into paying tribute might then support these efforts. One scholar has thus suggested that "Yusuf believed warring against the United States had great significance for his country – he wanted to impress Europe and Africa with his power."[16] From this perspective, the ensuing conflict may be described as a struggle for international prestige on both sides.

In the United States, the political situation also changed drastically, after Thomas Jefferson emerged victorious in the November 1800 presidential election. News of the *George Washington* – first published in December – had once again brought attention to US-Barbary relations. When Jefferson was inaugurated on March 4, 1801, the United States had resumed peaceful relations with France which meant the US fleet was no longer involved in any naval campaigns. On March 13, Jefferson received the October reports by James Cathcart, informing the president that the Bashaw of Tripoli had issued an ultimatum and was likely to declare war in the near future, if he had not done so already.[17]

Thomas Jefferson had long been the proponent of a more aggressive foreign policy against the Barbary States. After John Adams' "at best unsympathetic and at worst wholly apathetic" approach to the Barbary States (especially Tripoli), Jefferson, now commander in chief, was equipped with the means of dealing with the problem more forcefully.[18] In his inaugural address, Jefferson had espoused the principle of "honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none."[19] In practice, however, Jefferson did not wait long to make preparations for a naval expedition to the Mediterranean.

On May 15, Jefferson called in a cabinet meeting to discuss the efficacy and legality of a naval campaign against the backdrop of threats made by the Bashaw of Tripoli.[20] The sparse notes made on said meeting (jotted down by Jefferson himself) provide some insight into how the decision to send a naval squadron to the Mediterranean was reached. It is recorded that "all concur in the expediency of cruise."[21] Given Jefferson's firm conviction that tribute was

[15] Lotfi Ben Rejeb, "'To the Shores of Tripoli': The Impact of Barbary on Early American Nationalism," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1982), 40.
[16] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 204.
[17] Ian W. Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the U.S. Navy* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 165.
[18] Kitzen, "Money Bags or Cannon Balls," 622.
[19], Thomas Jefferson, "Inaugural Address," March 4, 1801 in Julian P. Boyd ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 44 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–), 33:150. Hereafter referred to as *PTJ*.
[20] Of course, there was no way of knowing that Yusuf Qaramanli had indeed declared war on the previous day.
[21] Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on a Cabinet Meeting," May 15, 1801, *PTJ*, 34:115.

"money thrown away,"[22] it appears that no member of the president's cabinet even brought up the prospect of a diplomatic solution.[23]

However, there were important questions regarding the constitutionality of unilaterally sending the navy into a possible war. After all, declarations of war were the prerogative of Congress. This raised questions about what the executive branch was legally authorized to do if another nation declared war on the United States: would Jefferson have to wait for congressional approval, or was he allowed to make a decision on his own accord? Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin and Secretary of the Navy Robert Smith evidently both argued that the president had authority to employ the navy at his own behest. The former claimed that "to declare war & to make war is synonimous. the [Executive] cannot put us in a state of war. but if we be put into that state either by the [declaration] of Congress or of the other nation, the command & direction of the public force then belongs to the [Executive]." The latter also affirmed that "if a nation commences war, the [Executive] is bound to apply the public force to defend the country."[24] In all, there was little resistance to the idea that a naval squadron might be sent to the Mediterranean without explicit congressional approval.[25]

This decision has since been scrutinized by several scholars who generally concur that Thomas Jefferson was in unchartered territory, constitutionally speaking.[26] Presidential historian Arthur M. Schlesinger has been one of the most candid in his criticism:

> In opposition Thomas Jefferson had been the apostle of strict construction and the foe of executive initiative. But viewing problems from the White House, he sent a naval squadron in the Barbary War, applied for congressional sanction six months later, then misled Congress as to the nature of his orders. He unilaterally authorized the seizure of armed vessels in waters extending the Gulf Stream,

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[22] Thomas Jefferson to Wilson Cary Nicholas, June 11, 1801, *PTJ*, 34:308.

[23] Ian W. Toll has argued that "even if Jefferson had wanted to reply before the threatened deadline, there was not enough time." See Toll, *Six Frigates*, 165. This, however, is not necessarily true. If, as Toll has also stated, Jefferson received reports of the bashaw's ultimatum on March 13, 1801, he could have responded by sending a letter and money to Tripoli, and it likely would have arrived prior to the declaration of war on May 14. (The transatlantic voyage usually took up to four weeks, although there were exceptions.) It remains doubtful whether this would have changed anything, but it is still worth pointing out that no one in the Jefferson administration appears to have even considered a diplomatic approach.

[24] Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on a Cabinet Meeting," May 15, 1801, *PTJ*, 34:114–115.

[25] The only noteworthy dissent came from Attorney General Levi Lincoln who argued that the US Navy should not be authorized to "destroy the enemy's vessels generally." See Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on a Cabinet Meeting," 15 May 1801, *PTJ*, 34:114.

[26] See, Alfred James Field, *America and the Mediterranean World, 1776–1882* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 49, David A. Carson, "Jefferson, Congress, and the Question of Leadership in the Tripolitan War," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 94 (1986): 412, Gerhard Casper, "Executive-Congressional Separation of Power during the Presidency of Thomas Jefferson," *Stanford Law Review* (1995): 483. A comparatively charitable interpretation on Jefferson's actions comes from David N. Mayer who takes into account the restrictive instructions issued to Commodore Richard Dale and thus commented that Jefferson "took the position . . . that the president lacked the power to act offensively against a nation which had both declared and made war on the United States. See David N. Mayer, *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 244.

> engaged in rearmament without congressional appropriations, withheld information from Congress, and invoked John Locke's doctrine of emergency prerogative – the law of self-preservation – to justify actions beyond congressional authorization.[27]

Clearly, Jefferson was testing the bounds of his executive powers on the issue of Tripoli.

Legal or not, Jefferson decided to send three frigates and a schooner to the Mediterranean. However, the instructions to Richard Dale, the squadron's first commander, were phrased carefully. Instead of citing the possibility of war as the primary purpose of the expedition, it was framed as a training exercise: "One great object expected from this Squadron is, the instruction of our young men: so that when their more active service shall hereafter be required, they may be capable of defending the honor of their country."[28] The threats made by Tripoli are still mentioned, although, similarly to the *George Washington* mission, the display of naval force was once more described as having "a tendency to prevent their breaking the Peace."[29] Thus, in case of continued peaceful relations with all the Barbary States, Dale was instructed to show off the American fleet at each port.

If, on the other hand, war had been declared by Tripoli, Dale's primary object would be to blockade the port of Tripoli to prevent their cruisers from leaving.[30] Once more, the State Department and Navy Department (the latter of which issued the instructions) were greatly overestimating the US Navy's capabilities, stating that "The force of Tunis & Tripoli are contemptible, & might be crushed with any one of the Frigates under your command."[31] Although the mission was questionable in its legality, Dale's instructions were phrased somewhat ambiguously and did not authorize an all-out war with Tripoli.

Despite these reservations, it appears more than likely that Jefferson and his cabinet were aware that their actions were constituting a provocation that was very likely to end in war. Moreover, Jefferson was probably expecting to receive popular support for his actions, especially after the *George Washington* incident. In fact, Secretary of State James Madison admitted as much, writing "The sending to Constantinople the national ship of war the *George*

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[27] Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), xi–xii.
[28] Secretary of the Navy to Richard Dale, May 20, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:465.
[29] Ibid. A private letter from the secretary of the treasury to the president further confirms that this view was still widespread in 1801: "I am apt to think there will be no fighting in the Mediterranean, & the sight of our Frigates will be sufficient to arrange matters there." See Albert Gallatin to Thomas Jefferson, August 18, 1801, *PTJ*, 35:108–109.
[30] Interestingly, these were by far the most restrained instructions of all possible scenarios. For instance, should *all* Barbary States have declared war, Dale was authorized to "chastise their insolence – by sinking, burning or destroying their ships & Vessels wherever you shall find them." Secretary of the Navy to Richard Dale, May 20, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:467.
[31] Ibid.

*Washington*, by force, under the Algerine flag, and for such a purpose, has deeply affected the sensibility, not only of the President, but of the people of the United States."[32]

In addition, Jefferson wrote an extremely provocative letter to the Bashaw of Tripoli. After repeatedly assuring the continued friendship of the president, Jefferson informed Bashaw Yusuf Qaramanli of the following:

> We have found it expedient to detach a squadron of observation into the Mediterranean sea, to superintend the safety of our commerce there & to exercise our seamen in nautical duties. we recommend them to your hospitality and good offices should occasion require their resorting to your habours. we hope that their appearance will give your umbrage no power for, while we mean to rest the safety of our comerce on the resources of our own strength & bravery in every sea, we have yet given them in strict command to conduct themselves toward all friendly powers with the most perfect respect & good order it being the first object of our sollicitude to cherish peace & friendship with all nations with whom it can be held on terms of equality & reciprocity.[33]

The short letter makes no mention of all previous demands to amend the treaty in order to allow for annual tribute. The letter was likely to produce one of two outcomes: either it would awe the bashaw into silence with the display of naval force, or it would provoke Tripoli into a declaration of war by simply ignoring Yusuf's main points of discontent.

In sum, both the Bashaw of Tripoli as well as Thomas Jefferson appeared eager to go to war. For Yusuf Qaramanli the reputation of the United States as a weak, submissive country likely informed his decision to declare war. Jefferson, on the other hand, had consistently proposed to fight the Barbary States throughout the previous two decades. Unsurprisingly, he seized the opportunity to dispatch part of the American fleet into the Mediterranean shortly after taking office. Unlike the previous administration, there is little evidence to suggest that either the president or his cabinet entertained any doubts that the United States would emerge victorious in the event of a war. This, it will be shown, proved to be a severe miscalculation.

**The First Barbary War's Depiction in Popular History**

When Richard Dale and his squadron arrived at the Straits of Gibraltar in July of 1801, they quickly learned that Tripoli had indeed declared war on the United States. The events succeeding Dale's arrival in the Mediterranean, usually referred to as the First Barbary War (alternatively, the Tripolitan War), have been the subject of numerous publications. The vast majority of these works follow the same general narrative structure. The following six

[32] Secretary of State to William Eaton and Richard O'Brien, May 20, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:460.
[33] Thomas Jefferson to Yusuf Qaramanli, May 21, 1801, *PTJ*, 34:159.

paragraphs are a summary of all the major "events" of the war that these publications generally do not fail to mention.

During the first year of war (1801), Dale's squadron – due to the restrictive instructions – was largely ineffective in making an impression on Tripoli. However, the *Enterprise* did find success in August by defeating an enemy vessel named *Tripoli*, and a number of Tripolitans were killed during the encounter while there were no American casualties. The American vessel's commander, Andrew Sterett, was celebrated as the conflict's first war hero.

In the following year (1802), Richard Valentine Morris became the new commander of the naval squadron. Morris is generally described as incompetent, and he had few noteworthy successes in the struggle against Tripoli. His blockade of Tripoli was so ineffective that Tripolitan cruisers were able to capture the American merchant vessel *Franklin* which was brought back safely into the harbor of Tripoli. The captured Americans were later redeemed with the help of the Dey of Algiers. Morris was recalled and replaced by Edward Preble who is generally lauded as the most bellicose of all the American naval commanders.

This notwithstanding, in October of 1803, Preble was confronted with a strategic disadvantage; the frigate *Philadelphia* ran ashore near Tripoli. The ship and its crew of 307 sailors were captured by the Tripolitans. The following February, Lieutenant Stephen Decatur was authorized by Preble to destroy the *Philadelphia* by infiltrating the harbor of Tripoli at night, using a previously captured enemy vessel. The mission was successful. The *Philadelphia* was set ablaze, and Decatur and his crew could flee the harbor without incurring any casualties on the American side. Decatur was widely celebrated, and his accolades exceeded even those of Sterett's.[34]

In August of 1804, Preble bombarded the harbor and town of Tripoli in an attempt to force the bashaw into submission. In September, the ship *Intrepid*, was fitted out with explosives to engage on a mission to infiltrate the harbor of Tripoli and blow up in order to destroy nearby enemy vessels. The mission failed, as the explosives detonated prematurely, killing all Americans aboard. As a result, the ship's captain, Richard Somers, became one of the most well-known martyrs of the war with Tripoli.

[34] For hagiographic accounts of Decatur's life, including his mission to destroy the *Philadelphia*, see, for example, Robert J. Allison, *Stephen Decatur: American Naval Hero, 1779–1820* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), Spencer Tucker, *Stephen Decatur: A Life most Bold and Daring* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2005), and Leonard F. Guttridge, *Our Country Right or Wrong: The Life of Stephen Decatur, the U.S. Navy's Most Illustrious Commander* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, LLC, 2006). For a more recent retelling of both the *Philadelphia* and the *Intrepid* missions, see Benjamin Armstrong, *Small Boats and Daring Men: Maritime Raiding, Irregular Warfare, and the Early American Navy* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 54–71.

The following year (1805), Tobias Lear, the new consul general to Algiers as well as the chief negotiator for the Americans, concluded a peace treaty with the bashaw by paying some $60,000 for the release of the crew of the *Philadelphia*. However, the treaty did not include provisions for an annual tribute which is usually framed as a success.

Either afterward, or prior to sections concerned with the conclusion of peace, it is generally noted that this success would have been impossible, had it not been for William Eaton, the former consul to Tunis, who found the bashaw's older brother Hamet near Alexandria, Egypt and convinced him to attempt to dethrone Yusuf and take up his place as the rightful bashaw. (Hamet had been exiled after Yusuf took power.) The two embarked on a mission to lay siege to the Tripolitan city of Derne. Commanding an army of Arab and European mercenaries, "General" Eaton and Hamet marched through the desert and succeeded in conquering Derne.[35] This allegedly pressured the bashaw into concluding the peace treaty that was negotiated after news of the conquest reached Tripoli. The American forces gave up the occupation of Derne afterwards.[36]

Many of these publications are painstakingly well-researched with regard to, for example, reconstructing individual ships' voyages, precise details of certain naval operations, etc. However, broadly speaking, the emphasis lies on judging the talents of individual naval commanders and detailed descriptions of naval battles in which the war's "heroes" (Andrew

[35] For praises of William Eaton's mission in particular, see, for example, Francis Rennell Rodd, *General William Eaton: The Failure of an Idea* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1932), Richard Zacks, *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), and Chipp Reid, *To the Walls of Derne: William Eaton, the Tripoli Coup and the End of the First Barbary War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2017).

[36] Ray W. Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776–1816* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), Louis B. Wright and Julia H. Macleod, *The First Americans in North Africa: William Eaton's Struggle for a Vigorous Policy against the Barbary Pirates, 1799–1805* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), Glenn Tucker, *Dawn Like Thunder: The First Barbary Wars and the Birth of the U.S. Navy* (Indianapolis & New York: The Bobs Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), A.B.C. Whipple, *To the Shores of Tripoli: The Birth of the U.S. Navy and Marines* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), Michael S. Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States at War: A History of American Relations with the Barbary States, 1785–1805* (Jefferson, North Carolina & London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1993), Joseph Wheelan, *Jefferson's War: America's First War on Terror, 1801–1805* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), Chipp Reid, *Intrepid Sailors: The Legacy of Preble's Boys and the Tripoli Campaign* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2012), Abigail G. Mullen, "'Good Neighborhood with All': Conflict and Cooperation in the First Barbary War, 1801–1805," (PhD diss., Northeastern University, 2017), Brian Kilmeade and Don Yaeger, *Thomas Jefferson and the Tripoli Pirates: The Forgotten War that Changed American History* (New York: Sentinel, 2017). Shorter versions of the same narrative are can also be found in R.C. Anderson, *Naval Wars in the Levant, 1559–1853* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1952), Howard P. Nash, *The Forgotten Wars: The Role of the U.S. Navy in the Quasi War with France and the Barbary Wars, 1798–1805* (South Brunswick & New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1968), Kenneth J. Hagan, *This People's Navy: The Making of American Sea Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), and Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014).

Sterett, Stephen Decatur, Richard Somers, William Eaton) are usually celebrated for their bravery. As a result, these works generally include comparatively little historical analysis.

The following sections will strive to analyze the conflict between Tripoli and the United States in chronological order, thus touching on the topics summarized above. However, the focus will be on how Americans at the time made sense of the war's main events in its relation to personal and national honor. Furthermore, as the struggle between the two countries was no longer confined to diplomacy, this chapter will also investigate how sailors of the US Navy conceived of the concept of honor in a military context. In addition, the end of James Cathcart's career (culminating in his exit from Mediterranean affairs during the war with Tripoli) will be addressed.

**1801: High Ambitions and Harsh Realities**

When William Eaton learned after months of uncertainty that Tripoli had finally declared war against the United States, he noted the following: "Is there no blood in American veins! Are we incapable of blushing! In less than ninety days this insult will be published in every Gazette in Europe – If our Government pocket it they will [put] a stain on the national character darker than infamy."[37] Eaton emphasized an important element of the conflict. Namely, that this war was characterized by a sense of publicity that diplomacy simply was not. Whereas American diplomats had previously lamented that paying tribute and ransom constituted a humiliating violation of US national honor, this process had largely been taking place unnoticed in the remote regencies of North Africa. Open conflict, on the other hand, was far more out in the open and as such exposed to the eyes of Europeans, as Eaton here readily acknowledged. As a result, the stakes were much higher, as any victories and defeats were expected to be scrutinized by European spectators.

Jefferson, too, had invoked European respect for the United States as a fundamental motivation for fighting the Barbary States as has been discussed previously. If there was an audience for the honorable conduct of American sailors (as representatives of the nation), it was most certainly primarily Europe and only then, as an afterthought, the Barbary States. Now that war with Tripoli seemed imminent, it "offered a convenient excuse for augmenting American military power and demonstrating its naval capabilities to skeptical European statesmen."[38] Of

[37] William Eaton to William Smith, May 24, 1801, William Eaton Papers, "Letterbook December 14, 1799 – June 28, 1801," The Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Hereafter referred to as HL.
[38] James R. Sofka, "The Jeffersonian Idea of National Security: Commerce, the Atlantic Balance of Power, and the Barbary War, 1786–1805," *Diplomatic History* 21 (1997): 532.

course, this line of reasoning relied on the assumption that the American navy would defeat its North African antagonist without much effort.

The expectation of winning easily against any one (or all) of the Barbary States in a military sense was both widespread and an enormous miscalculation: "Jefferson and his cabinet officials were delusional in believing that three frigates and a schooner could hold their own against the combined navies of Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers."[39] The reasons for this error in judgment were manifold. For one, it seems to have been simply unthinkable to entertain the idea that a people frequently characterized as culturally and racially inferior "barbarians" could pose a serious challenge to the American navy. There is no evidence, for example, that even the possibility of a military defeat was discussed during the cabinet meeting that resulted in the decision to send a squadron to the Mediterranean. This assessment may have been a direct result of consular reports which repeatedly downplayed the capabilities of Barbary fleets during the previous years. There were also several logistical and tactical failures which quickly proved that a swift, decisive victory would be unattainable.

For the American side, the first year of open conflict against Tripoli was widely regarded as the implementation of a policy for which the consuls had been advocating since their arrival at the Barbary coast: namely, to defend American honor through strength, since all diplomatic options had been exhausted. In the following, it will be investigated in how far the initial display of any sizable naval force in the Mediterranean was at first considered to advance the reputation of the United States abroad, citing Andrew Sterett's naval victory over a Tripolitan ship. Following this, it will be addressed to what extent this initial optimism may be regarded as somewhat of a misinterpretation, taking into account Richard Dale's experiences when his ship made an appearance near the Bay of Gibraltar.

On August 1, 1801, one month after the arrival of Richard Dale's squadron in the Mediterranean, the schooner *Enterprise* fell in with an enemy vessel, the *Tripoli*. The encounter resulted in an exchange of fire that ended with twenty Tripolitans dead and the rest of the crew surrendering. The Americans suffered no casualties. Because his instructions did not allow the captain, Andrew Sterett, to take the *Tripoli* as a prize, he had the ship disarmed and dismantled but ultimately allowed the Tripolitans to return to their home port.

While the strategic significance of this first naval battle was negligible, Andrew Sterett nevertheless became the war's first celebrity. James Cathcart expressed admiration and optimism when he learned of the encounter: "the Capture of the Tripoline Cruiser in its tendency is equal to a victory & reflects the greatest honor of Mr. Sterrett & his brave officers

[39] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 94.

& men, a few more actions will effectually establish our national character in this sea."[40] Notably, Cathcart not only emphasized the captain's conduct but also the wider ramifications for the reputation of the United States in the Mediterranean.

Those involved in the war appear to have been optimistic that the American navy would prove to be continuously victorious against Tripoli and secure a peace treaty on their own terms. The exiled Cathcart, as former consul, evidently still perceived himself to be the person of choice to negotiate with the Bashaw of Tripoli. In a letter to Richard Dale, he laid out the conditions for what he deemed acceptable terms for a new peace treaty: "I solemnly declare that if a peace could be procured with the Regency of Tripoli for one hundred Dollars that it would be contrary to the interests of the United States to pay it."[41] To the secretary of state, Cathcart reiterated his resolve: "the President . . . shall never see the name of Cathcart at the foot of a dishonorable treaty."[42] These letters reflect a general sense of enthusiasm and point to the widespread conviction that victory against Tripoli could still be achieved with ease.

To win honorably emerged as one of the war's primary objectives. Early on during the conflict, Cathcart's letter indicated that the conception of such a peace entailed that any money paid to obtain a peace treaty would be deemed contrary to that end. Even before he was informed of Sterett's victory, Cathcart had expressed a similar sentiment: "it is my unalterable opinion that no treaty ought ever to be made with Tripoli, untill its Government are made sensible of their inferiority."[43] This, too, was clearly referring to the idea that buying a peace treaty should be regarded as unacceptable. Furthermore, American soldiers were expected to fight courageously to assert the honor of their country. Sterett's victory may then be interpreted as having served the dual purpose of exhibiting American willpower in the Mediterranean as well as being conducive toward forcing Tripoli to accept honorable terms of peace, dictated by the United States.

News of Sterett's victory sparked similar reactions in the United States. When Thomas Jefferson finally informed Congress that he had sent part of the US Navy to the Mediterranean, he was able to boast that this decision had already yielded positive results: "One of the Tripolitan cruisers having fallen in with, and engaged the small schooner Enterprise, commanded by Lieutenant Sterret, which had gone as a tender to our larger vessels, was

[40] James Cathcart to James Madison, September 7, 1801, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.
[41] James Cathcart to Richard Dale, September 7, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:572.
[42] James Cathcart to James Madison, September 7, 1801, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.
[43] James Cathcart to Richard Dale, August 10, 1801, William Eaton Papers, Box 5, letters August 2, 1801 – March 31, 1802, HL.

captured, after a heavy slaughter of her men, without the loss of a single one on our part."[44] He went on to note that "the bravery exhibited by our citizens on that element, will, I trust, be a testimony to the world that it is not the want of that virtue which makes us seek their peace."[45] Like Cathcart, Jefferson thus emphasized the international context and publicity of the event. Winning was no mere end in itself; Europe, too, was supposed to take notice.

In acknowledging that a state of war existed at this point, Jefferson went on in his message to request authorization to engage in "measures of offence, also."[46] In February of 1802, Congress obliged and authorized Jefferson to wage war unilaterally by passing "An Act for the Protection of the Commerce and Seamen of the United States, against the Tripolitan Cruisers." However, there was no formal declaration of war. In this, the legislature granted Jefferson an extraordinary amount of leeway in conducting foreign policy.[47] After this, Congress "never gained – or even attempted to gain – control over American relations with the Barbary powers."[48]

Congress also passed legislation to present Captain Sterett with a commemorative sword for the "heroic action," and the entire crew of the *Enterprise* received an extra month's pay.[49] President Jefferson also wrote a letter to personally congratulate Sterett for his conduct. In it, Jefferson first lamented that "for too long, for the honour of nations, have those barbarians been suffered to trample on the sacred faith of treaties, on the right & law of human nature." But in praising Sterett's action, Jefferson observed that the United States would no longer acquiesce and that this victory was a first step in the right direction: "you have shewn to your countrymen that that enemy cannot meet bravery & skill united."[50] Unsurprisingly, a study of American public reactions to the war with Tripoli thus concluded that "Sterett became the first hero of the Tripolitan War, leading Americans to believe that defeating Tripoli would be easy."[51]

While Andrew Sterett's conduct had briefly evoked approving comments from virtually all Americans involved in the war with Tripoli, the excitement over this first victory proved to be short-lived. It had been the only noteworthy event during the first year of war, and many Americans had hoped it would establish the United States as a respectable nation in the

[44] Thomas Jefferson, "First Annual Message to Congress," December 8, 1801, *PTJ*, 36:59.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] The law stated, among other things, that the president could equip and employ armed vessels, make prizes of enemy vessels, take prisoners, and even commission private ships to also take prizes. See "Act Pertaining to the Navy," February 6, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:51–52.
[48] Carson, "Jefferson, Congress, and the Question of Leadership in the Tripolitan War," 415.
[49] "Act Pertaining to the Navy," February 3, 1802, *Naval Documents*, I:539–540.
[50] Thomas Jefferson to Andrew Sterett, December 1, 1801, *PTJ*, 36:3.
[51] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 113.

Mediterranean. For the remainder of 1801, however, few additional opportunities presented themselves.

In total, the American fleet consisted of four ships and was given with the monumental task of both protecting American merchant vessels against Tripolitan cruisers as well as blockading the port of Tripoli. Moreover, when the American squadron arrived in Gibraltar, it was discovered that the Tripolitan admiral laid at anchor there with his ship. Dale decided to leave one of his frigates, the *Philadelphia*, outside of the harbor, to keep the admiral "penned up" and intercept the ship in case it should set out to sea again.[52] This left Richard Dale with only three ships to carry out his instructions.

The American fleet then proceeded to Tripoli. Dale then formed an agreement with the Swedish navy to cooperate by mutually protecting merchant vessels and blockading Tripoli's harbor. However, throughout his tenure as commander of the American forces (which ended in February of 1802), Dale never made the blockade of Tripoli his primary objective. Instead, he focused on providing protection for American merchant vessels. By winter, "the American squadron gave up even the pretense of blockade."[53]

There is little evidence to support the view many Mediterranean countries – Barbary or European – respected America's desire to isolate Tripoli. In November of 1801, for example, Dale wrote to the American consul in Livorno (or Leghorn) that a number of European merchant vessels were still engaged in trade with Tripoli, despite the fact that a blockade had been declared. He requested the consul to "Inform those powers, and all others, that It may concern that the Port of Tripoli is under Blockade by Ships of War of the United States."[54] However, had American warships been present outside the harbor of Tripoli, these would have been able to intercept any incoming European vessels.[55] In effect, Dale was telling the consul to kindly ask European merchant vessels to refrain from engaging in trade with Tripoli, because the blockade could not be enforced.

Earlier, Commodore Dale had also expressed frustration over the disrespectful treatment of American ships in European ports. For example, when Dale, aboard the ship *President*, was at anchor in the Bay of Gibraltar to purchase supplies, he was informed that an American supply ship had been placed under quarantine there. Dale wrote a letter to the governor of Saint Roque,

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[52] Mullen, "Good Neighborhood with All," 39.
[53] Ibid., 65.
[54] Richard Dale to Thomas Appleton, November 24, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:624–625.
[55] The Secretary of the Navy once explained the law surrounding naval blockades as follows: "the besieging party has a right to prohibit entirely all commerce with a besieged Town. If we lay siege to a place or only form the blockade, we have a right to prevent any one from entering the place blockaded, and to treat as enemy whoever attempts to enter or carry any thing to the besieged without leave." See Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, August 3, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:505.

stating, "I give you my Honor, Sir there is no, Infectious disease on Board, nor has there, Ever been Since She was Built."[56] However, Dale's assurances were evidently not deemed sufficient, and the ship was held there for ten days.[57]

Only a few days later, on October 19, unfavorable winds caused an American merchant vessel to sail in the vicinity of a Spanish fort near the coastline. Aboard the *President* (laying at anchor nearby), it could be observed that the merchant vessel – flying American colors – was fired at by the fort. One man (presumably an American) was killed, and the ship was damaged. Dale wrote a letter in protest following this event, stating "I conceive such conduct more resembles the Savages than a civilized nation."[58] A few days later, a similar incident occurred, when yet another American ship came close to the Spanish fort. Dale reported: "the Brig stood within Gun shot, not knowing that they had done rong . . . the fort commenced fireing at her . . . what am I to judge from such conduct but that the Officers commanding at these Forts are perfect Savages and wish to kill Innocent men for mear sport sake."[59]

In his letter to the governor of Saint Roque (in command of the fort), Dale framed these instances as grave insults to American honor and threatened to defend American merchant ships by force, if necessary: "I conceive the last transaction to be a direct Insult to the Flag of my nation . . . and should a similor circumstance take place . . . I shall return the fire, let the consiquence be what it may."[60] The series of incidents would likely not have resulted in a full-fledged war, but even the threat of using force against the Spanish fort in this instance appears like an extreme response to what might have been regarded by the fort as defensive action or simply a misunderstanding.

It appears that Dale soon realized that the letter's aggressive tone had been imprudent. Only a few days later, he wrote yet another letter to the governor of Saint Roque which reads like an attempt to mitigate the effects of his previous inflammatory remarks:

> Your Excellency appears to be hurt at some part of my letter . . . I suppose you alude to the word Savages; my allusion, was confin'd soley to the Officers, or men that was in the Forts at the time . . . I should be sorry to think, that your Excellency should, suppose, that my allusion was to the whole nation, no Sir, my respect is to great for all nations . . . I have to observe to your Excellency that the United States wishes to be at peace and in friendship with all nations . . . but at the same time, I wish your excellency to conceive that the United States of America, will not suffer an insult with Impunity from any Nation.[61]

[56] Richard Dale to Governor of Saint Roque, October 9, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:596.
[57] Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States at War*, 53.
[58] Richard Dale to Governor of Saint Roque, October 27, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:608–609.
[59] Ibid., I:609.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Richard Dale to Governor of Saint Roque, October 30, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:611–612.

The choice of words notably shifted to achieve a more conciliatory tone.

In one sense, the letter contained a subtle admission by Dale that he had expressed his frustrations too crudely for an exchange between representatives of ostensibly civilized nations. To equivocate all Spanish subjects with "savages" was very clearly perceived as a pointed insult. This, Dale, readily conceded, and a sizable portion of the letter is devoted to expunging any remaining notions that an American commander had insulted the people of a friendly nation (which, most importantly of course, would have included the governor himself). The preservation of personal honor between gentlemen was thus a key component of this exchange.

Moreover, the letter is indicative of the standing of the United States within the international hierarchy of nations. Spanish troops, in two separate instances, opened fire on American merchant vessels while in sight of an American ship of war. In response to this, all that Dale effectively did was write a strongly worded letter, the content of which he later largely disavowed to preserve friendly relations between the United States and Spain. These literary outbursts – and the subsequent retraction thereof – reflect a strong desire by American naval commanders to uphold and defend a notion of international prestige which the United States was presumed to enjoy. To deny America's rank as a powerful nation thus resulted in strong rhetoric. However, Dale also showed an awareness that he lacked the necessary means to enforce favorable treatment by European countries. Indeed, not even the presence of American warships appears to have made a positive impression on representatives of what was considered one of the weaker powers of Europe.

By the end of 1801, the United States had achieved comparatively little from a strategic point of view. There had been a single naval battle that ended with an American victory. However, the enemy ship and crew had been set free afterward. What is more, international respect was perceived to be lacking: "despite the *Enterprize*'s victory, the Americans had generally demonstrated that they were only a lesser power in the Mediterranean community."[62] The failure to enforce a naval blockade effectively also meant that Tripoli had not suffered any discernible strategic disadvantage during the first months of the war.

### 1802: Continued Disappointment

The second year of war was characterized by inaction as well as disappointment for the American side. Winter forced the US squadron to abandon its post before Tripoli and seek refuge in European ports. Richard Dale's tenure as commander of the American fleet ended in

[62] Mullen, Good Neighborhood with All, 65.

early 1802. However, it was not yet known when his replacement would arrive. This notwithstanding, Dale left part of his squadron in the Mediterranean and set out for the United States. Upon arrival, he learned that his successor, Richard Valentine Morris, had not even set sail. The remaining forces in the Mediterranean were thus largely left without direction: "Without a clear leader, the squadron struggled to maintain a coherent mission . . . It was impossible to discern who was in charge, and therefore difficult to proceed with determination."[63]

When Commodore Morris finally arrived at the Straits of Gibraltar, he was confronted with one additional problem: US relations with Morocco had deteriorated. The Emperor of Morocco had requested earlier that the American consul, James Simpson, should issue a passport for a Moroccan vessel to allow the delivery of wheat to Tripoli. Simpson refused on the grounds that he did not know whether he was authorized to do so. Dale had deferred the question to his successor. After some back and forth, during which there was a brief declaration of war by the emperor (though no hostile actions), peaceful relations were reestablished in August of 1802.[64]

Given the distracting crisis in Morocco, Commodore Morris did little to further the war effort. He even failed to make a single personal appearance before Tripoli in 1802 despite the fact that, unlike Dale, he was explicitly authorized to negotiate a treaty with the bashaw.[65] Instead, much of his time was dedicated to the convoy of American merchant vessels, and it has been suggested by some historians that Morris' reluctance to engage in more belligerent actions was informed by the fact that he was accompanied by his wife whom he wished to protect from direct engagements.[66] After Sweden once again established peaceful relations with Tripoli, resulting in Swedish ships to withdraw from the blockade, an American warship off Tripoli sailed for Toulon to purchase supplies which left Tripoli completely unguarded for a time in August of 1802.[67]

Unsurprisingly, this lackluster approach resulted in another setback. In June, the American merchant ship *Franklin* was seized by Tripolitan cruisers. Initially, the *Franklin* and its crew of ten was taken to Algiers, then Biserta (near Tunis), and finally Tripoli. Neither Richard O'Brien nor William Eaton were able to effect the release of the prisoners when the ship was nearby.[68] In a letter, the ship's captain expressed his opinion regarding the American

[63] Ibid., 72–73.
[64] Ibid., 76.
[65] Secretary of the Navy to Richard V. Morris, April 20, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:130.
[66] See Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States at War*, 61. See also Mullen, "Good Neighborhood with All," 73–74.
[67] Alexander Murray to Secretary of the Navy, August 14, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:234.
[68] Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 117–118.

naval blockade of Tripoli: "I cannot pass over the disappointment I experienced in not falling in with some of our Vessels of war during one months Captivity on board the Corsair . . . the most provoking circumstance was off this place [Tripoli] when we had arrived within about five Leagues of the Port . . . in view of a Swedish and American Frigate, who never made the least effort to obstruct our progress."[69] Clearly, the naval blockade of Tripoli was far from effectual.

Indeed, there were many reports of Tripolitan ships roaming the Mediterranean. In Algiers, Richard O'Brien said he had heard rumors that "asserted that there are at Sea at present 6 Sail of Tripoli corsairs."[70] William Eaton stated that at least five enemy vessels were out at sea.[71] James Cathcart stated to have heard confirming reports "that the cruisers of Tripoli have been frequently at sea since the war commenced."[72] By mid-1802, it became increasingly evident that neither the mere display of a naval force,[73] nor the active employment of American warships significantly impeded Tripoli's capability to seize American merchant vessels.

One reason for the ineffectiveness of American warships was their maneuverability. Eaton explained the problem thusly: "It is impossible to block Tripoli with large ships as to prevent these row-boats from stealing out; it is equally impossible for large ships to catch them when out . . . That regency [Tripoli] has not, at this moment, a single vessel able to fight the Schooner *Enterprize*."[74] The issue was not, therefore, that the US Navy lacked firepower; the new squadron had even increased the total number of guns from 126 to 180.[75] Rather, the Tripolitans had found ways to simply circumvent direct confrontation with the heavily armed American frigates.

The fact that American warships were ineffectual against the supposedly inferior Tripolitan vessels (that is, when comparing the number of guns) contributed to a marked increase in expressions of frustration and shame in the correspondence of the American consuls. Strategically, the war had effectively come to a stalemate, yet provocations by Tripoli (such as the capture of the *Franklin*) not only exposed American vulnerabilities but additionally

[69] Andrew Morris to James Cathcart, July 22, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:177
[70] Richard O'Brien to U.S. Consul in Leghorn, June 26, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:187.
[71] William Eaton to Summert & Brown, July 9, 1802, William Eaton Papers, Letterbook June 28, 1801 – August 23, 1802, HL.
[72] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, July 4, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:191.
[73] The instructions to Commodore Morris are still reflective of the view that positive results might be achieved by: "holding out the olive branch in one hand & displaying in the other the means of offensive operations" See Secretary of the Navy to Richard V. Morris, April 20, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:130.
[74] William Eaton to Summert & Brown, July 9, 1802, William Eaton Papers, Letterbook June 28, 1801 – August 23, 1802, HL.
[75] Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 136.

threatened to embarrass the United States internationally. With the war having progressed into its second year, William Eaton issued a stern warning concerning the current state of affairs. In a letter, Eaton emphasized the moral implications of not acting more forcefully:

> we risque to place a farce here, which in its progress will entrain the most disgraceful and the most inhuman sacrifices: our property captured and sold without the most distant prospect of indemnity – and our Citizens dragged to Slavery and goaded to a lingering death under the bastinade of merciless robbers. And what is still more humiliating, after all this we shall be compelled to *purchase a peace* on the terms of an unprincipled overbearing Bashaw of a wretched dog-kennel, without at all remedying the evil – If Americans can yield to this, and look the world in the face without a blush, let her blot the stars from her escutcheon and viel with sack-cloth the sun of her former glory.[76]

Eaton outlined the stakes; not only had the war effort been lacking resolve, the consequences of this were risking the humiliation of further captures as well as a costly peace. These, in turn, would culminate in the dishonor of the United States publicly – in the face of "the world."

James Cathcart expressed a similar sentiment when he learned Tripolitans had captured the *Franklin*. He also expressed disappointment: "it proves that we cannot evade the depredations of the most insignificant cruisers of the most insignificant Barbary State –What!"[77] The fact that the US Navy proved incapable against the supposedly weakest of the Barbary States was here presented as especially humiliating. For the consuls, there seems to have been a general sense of shame: "Clearly, the diplomats believed that the United States was not winning the Tripolitan War and that the government had failed to capitalize upon the momentum from last August's victory."[78]

After this initial shock, the crew of the *Franklin* was redeemed comparatively quickly. Half were redeemed as foreigners which put the number of American captives at five. Richard O'Brien was ultimately able to secure their release through the mediation of the Dey of Algiers. And while the dey cited the voyage of the *George Washington* as the reason for his gratuitous behavior, he did not fail to bill the United States for $6,500.[79] Hence, Dey of Algiers was hardly acting with exclusively charitable intentions.

The mediation of the Dey of Algiers sparked a minor controversy among the consuls. William Eaton alleged that because Richard Dale had already released a number of prisoners previously, Tripoli still effectively owed the United States the release of the captives. Moreover, Eaton expressed concerns over yet another instance of Tripoli being in some sense dependent

[76] William Eaton to Summert & Brown, July 9, 1802, William Eaton Papers, Letterbook June 28, 1801 – August 23, 1802, HL.
[77] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, July 15, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:204.
[78] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 117.
[79] Ibid., 119.

on Algiers. [80] James Cathcart agreed that "any Expense or Obligation incurred on the Part of the United States has been entire thrown away And has only served to Embarrass our affairs."[81] In the end, however, the *Franklin* affair "ended quickly without creating the same shock and concern as the earlier Algerian incidents" some two decades ago.[82]

Despite the display of American naval power in the Mediterranean, one successful naval battle, as well as the (nominal) blockade, there is little evidence to suggest that these actions contributed to – as was commonly believed – awing any of the Barbary States into a "peaceful disposition" toward the United States.[83] Morocco, of course, had declared war against the United States, albeit briefly. On the conclusion of the peace in August of 1802, the American consul had stated that he hoped Morris' arrival "has made such an impression on these people with respect to the American Navy, as will be lasting."[84] However, Morocco resumed hostilities against the United States in 1803 which would indicate that the display of Morris' forces had little effect on the emperor.

Likewise, the Dey of Algiers did not express any timidity over the war with Tripoli. Consul Richard O'Brien (referring to himself in the third person) reported that "The dey attacked the consul of the U States . . . to write directly for the old *George Washington* to come to Algiers in order to be sent by the dey to Constantionople to Bring Stores to Algiers."[85] Later that year, O'Brien further reported that Algiers positively refused to accept cash in lieu of naval stores.[86] (Generally, the consuls were instructed to pay the annual tribute in cash instead of supplying a potential enemy with equipment to fit out corsairs.) Clearly, the Dey of Algiers did not perceive the war with Tripoli as a threat or impediment to his demands.

Lastly, there was the regency of Tunis. In September of 1802, the Bey of Tunis, Hamouda Bashaw, wrote a letter to President Thomas Jefferson. Acknowledging to have received "all the military and naval stores, as well as superb jewels" by the US government, the bey nevertheless insisted "that it would be very agreeable to me that you should send me a good frigate of 36 guns."[87] Ever since the Dey of Algiers had received the frigate *Crescent* as a gift,

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[80] Undermining O'Brien, Eaton wrote a personal letter to the bashaw, assuring him that "We believe it would suit better both the independence of your [Excellency's] character and the interests of the parties that all our negociations should be direct and without intervention of any other power." See William Eaton to Bashaw of Tripoli, September 18, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:279.
[81] James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, November 25, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:322.
[82] Lawrence Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785–1816* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 145.
[83] Secretary of the Navy to Richard V. Morris, April 20, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:130.
[84] James Simpson to Secretary of State, August 3, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:221–222.
[85] Richard O'Brien, "Statement of Particulars relative to the Regency of Algiers in July 1802," *Naval Documents*, II:199.
[86] Richard O'Brien to Secretary of State, November 23, 1802, Naval Documents, II:321.
[87] Bey of Tunis to Thomas Jefferson, September 8, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:269.

the bey repeatedly insisted to be treated with the same deference. The war with Tripoli does not appear to have made any difference in this regard.

In all, the navy's conduct in the Mediterranean had done nothing to further the respectability of the United States. Americans expressed frustration over the conditions with which they approximated the national honor of their country – for example, receiving favorable treatment by European countries or the lowering of demands by the Barbary States. Neither had come to fruition. On the contrary, "the futility of American naval operations had eroded American prestige in the Mediterranean. The United States, its envoys warned, was on the verge of becoming a general laughingstock throughout the region, and the result might weaken the American bargaining position in future negotiations with other Barbary powers."[88]

Another important aspect to US foreign policy during the first year of war was the cooperation with Sweden. In 1801, Richard Dale, without instructions to do so, agreed to cooperate with a Swedish admiral, emphasizing the "mutual advantage . . . to both nations."[89] As a result, Swedish warships helped to blockade the harbor of Tripoli and convoyed American merchant vessels throughout 1801 and 1802. From afar, it might have appeared that Jefferson's 1786 plan of forming a general alliance with smaller European powers against the Barbary States had begun to take shape.

However, the alliance was met with mixed reactions. James Cathcart had been approached at roughly the same time Richard Dale learned of the opportunity but dismissed the idea without even seeking the advice of the commodore. Instead, he reported "proposals have been made to me to form a coalition with the Ships of Sweden which I discouraged, as I have no idea of dividing the honor of setting an example to all Europe, our aim is to establish a National character . . . without the assistance of any of the powers of Europe."[90] While Cathcart was still conceivably authorized to renegotiate a peace treaty with Tripoli, he was clearly out of bounds when it came to making unilateral strategic decisions about how the war was to be conducted.

William Eaton, too, expressed skepticism. Long distrustful of the alleged machinations of Europe, he wrote that "Denmark, and Sweden, on the score of Contributions, are as formidable rivals as England and France; for as they calculate on nothing but payments for the maintenance of their peace [and] here they will go great lengths."[91] Additionally, like Cathcart,

[88] Toll, *Six Frigates*, 173.
[89] Richard Dale to David Humphreys, October 28, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:610.
[90] James Cathcart to Richard Dale, September 17, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:576.
[91] William Eaton to James Madison, October 12, 1801, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tunis, T303, Roll 2, NARA.

Eaton specifically called for the United States to defeat Tripoli by itself: "what American can cheerfully admit the idea that the United States will think proper to divide with any nation whatever the honor and the advantages of chastising Tripoli[?]"[92]

The consensus among American consuls once more emphasizes that for the diplomats merely winning was not sufficient in itself. Because the war was contextualized within a broader struggle for national honor on the international stage, the goal was to win honorably. This entailed not sharing the glory of victory with any other country, least of all one of those considered a secondary power of Europe. The United States was supposed to emerge as the sole victor of the conflict. This alone would establish the United States as an honorable country, comparable in strength with Great Britain and France. The assistance of Sweden was directly contrary to these objectives.

Members of the State Department as well as US naval officers differed from this perspective. By 1802, James Cathcart was initially tasked with overseeing the negotiations for a new peace treaty with Tripoli (in cooperation with Richard Morris). In the instructions, the "good disposition" of Sweden was praised, and it was even suggested that negotiations might go "hand in hand" if results might be favorable. The cooperation with Sweden, it was alleged, would contribute to "extinguishing the hope of dividing his enemies."[93] It was stressed, however, that any peace treaty should be "unconnected and independent" of Sweden."[94]

Commodore Morris was likewise instructed to continue the military alliance first established by Richard Dale. New instructions went even further in ordering Morris to "cordially co-operate with the Swedes and with every other nation at War with those Barbary Powers that may have declared or waged war against us."[95] In this letter, Morris was also informed that two more frigates were going to reinforce American forces in the Mediterranean, as news of Morocco's declaration of war had then reached the United States. (For the State Department, there was no way of knowing that peaceful relations had already been resumed.) The decision to pursue temporary military alliances must have seemed advantageous from a strategic standpoint, considering that the United States appeared incapable of effectively blockading a single port.

And yet, in the 1802 annual address to Congress, Thomas Jefferson omitted any mention of cooperation with Sweden. Perhaps the omission stemmed from a desire to avoid charges of

[92] William Eaton to James Madison, December 13, 1801, William Eaton Papers, Letterbook June 28, 1801 – August 23, 1802, HL.
[93] Secretary of State to James Cathcart, April 18, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:126–128.
[94] Ibid., II:127
[95] Secretary of the Navy to Richard V. Morris, August 27 [or 28], 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:258.

hypocrisy. A year earlier, he had promised to govern under the famous principle of "entangling alliances with none." Alternatively, it might have been considered embarrassing to publicize that the United States was receiving help from one of the lesser powers of Europe. In the address, Jefferson also informed the American public that the crew of the *Franklin* had been captured, so perhaps it was considered impolitic to concede that the United States was incapable of protecting its commerce even with the help of foreign nations.

In the end, the cooperation proved to be short-lived. By October 1802, William Eaton reported that peace between Sweden and Tripoli had been established. The price for peace was $150,000, a present worth $8,000, and another $8,000 in annual tribute. Because the treaty was negotiated with the help of a French ambassador, Eaton evidently considered his conspiracies of European malice toward the United States confirmed. The Swedish admiral reportedly alleged that the French mediation had saved Sweden $100,000. On this, Eaton commented "*the national honor and independence of Sweden are thrown into the scale to balance the obligation!*"[96] Considering that the United States and Sweden at this point might be regarded as similar with regard to their naval forces, the episode indicated under what terms Americans might expect to resume peaceful relations with Tripoli.

As the year 1802 drew to a close, nothing of note had been accomplished. The capture of the brig *Franklin* was considered an embarrassment, as the Tripolitans were able to return to Tripoli "under the nose of the blockaders."[97] Neither of the remaining Barbary States had shown any signs of intimidation. Morocco even briefly declared war, whereas Tunis and Algiers both issued new demands despite the presence of the US Navy in the Mediterranean. The naval blockade of Tripoli, weak to begin with, had become even more porous when the Swedish fleet withdrew after negotiations had ended in a new peace treaty. After a brief period of initial optimism in 1801, the United States was still risking prolonged international embarrassment.

**1803: Sinking to New Lows**

Commodore Morris remained in charge of the American fleet during the first eight months of 1803. Throughout the remainder of his tenure, the war effort progressed slightly more aggressively in comparison to the prior year. Throughout the early winter months, there was little to do for the American squadron. However, in May there were some minor exchanges of fire between the Tripolitan batteries and American warships. It was reported that some

[96] William Eaton to Secretary of State, October 22, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:306.
[97] Mullen, "Good Neighborhood with All," 78.

Tripolitans were killed, and the bashaw's brother-in-law reportedly lost an arm during these exchanges.[98]

On June 2, there was an exchange of musket fire between Americans on some smaller row boats and Tripolitan forces near the shorelines. Several Tripolitans were killed in action and two Americans were wounded. A midshipman named Henry Wadsworth recorded the events in his journal. He reported how the American forces came "within about pistol shot of the enemies Boat" when an exchange of fire soon erupted. In a later encounter, the killing of a Tripolitan on horseback was described in dramatic fashion: "flourishing his carbine in defiance [he] began his circuit full speed: when he came near several took aim at him: he plunged forward & bit the dust."[99] These passages provide a comparatively rare perspective of a lower-ranking naval officer, who, unlike the commodores, was directly involved in expeditions against Tripoli.

And while the account of the battle was written mostly in the form of a journal, Wadsworth also hinted at an audience for his writings. By the end of the day's entry, he commented on the detailed descriptions of the events by noting that he should not "have been so particular, but for my friends at home."[100] Clearly, Wadsworth took into account a wider readership after his return to the United States.

Within this context, some final remarks stand out. Commenting on the events of the day, Wadsworth concluded the following: "t'was good sport I must confess . . . Yet they had no right to complain when with fifty men we attacked them on their own shores – for there if we gave death, we likewise expos'd ourselves to receive it."[101] In this instance, the author emphasized the fairness of the battle by pointing out that the American soldiers had exposed themselves to the danger of being within the enemy's range of fire, thus highlighting their bravery. Like many of his superior officers, this midshipman, addressing an imagined audience, stressed how the American soldiers had behaved honorably which in this context also entailed that US troops had faced the enemy on equal terms. Wadsworth's journal thus affirms that the pursuit of honor – in this case within a militaristic context – constituted a motivation for even ordinary sailors.

Less than a week after the battle took place, Commodore Morris landed in Tripoli to negotiate a peace treaty. The bashaw demanded $200,000 for peace as well as $20,000 in annual tribute.[102] These demands exceeded even the price Sweden had paid for peace, despite the short-lived naval presence off Tripoli. Commodore Morris rejected the terms and hostilities resumed.

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[98] "Extract from journal of Midshipman Henry Wadsworth," May 27, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:425, "Extract from journal of Midshipman Henry Wadsworth," May 30, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:430.
[99] "Extract from journal of Midshipman Henry Wadsworth," June 2, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:435.
[100] "Extract from journal of Midshipman Henry Wadsworth," June 3, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:437.
[101] Ibid.
[102] "Extract from journal of Midshipman Henry Wadsworth," June 9, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:449.

Clearly, US actions in the Mediterranean, despite becoming slightly more aggressive by 1803, were not having noticeable effects on the demands made by the Bashaw of Tripoli.

Soon thereafter, on June 22, the frigate *John Adams* and the *Enterprise* encountered another Tripolitan vessel which they destroyed in battle. According to Commodore Morris, the enemy ship was "the largest Cruizer belonging to Tripoli, and . . . a very fine vessel," and he went on to report that that after a fire exchange, "the Enemy's colors hauled down, at the same time, firing both their Broadsides, which was accompanied by the Ships Blowing up with a Heavy explosion."[103] According to a second report the majority of the ship's crew (alleged to number 240 men) were able to get on shore, before the ship exploded.[104] Remarkably, despite representing a clear victory, this battle did not garner nearly as much attention as the *Enterprise's* victory in 1801.[105]

In 1803, US relations with Morocco once more deteriorated, and the two countries were at the brink of war. In August, Captain William Bainbridge, roaming the Mediterranean in search of Tripolitan vessels, fell in with the Moroccan ship *Miborka* which had captured an American ship, the *Celia*.[106] At around the same time, Richard Morris' replacement, Edward Preble, had arrived in the Mediterranean and soon inspected another Moroccan ship, the *Maimona*. However, since the Moroccan captain could produce a passport that was issued by the American consul, he let the ship go. Later, Preble learned of Bainbridge's capture and that Moroccan captains had allegedly received secret orders to prey on American ships.[107] For a brief period of time, it seemed like there would be further hostilities. Preble reported that he had given orders to his naval commanders "to capture the vessels of the Emperor of Morocco . . . as he has given Orders to his cruisers to Capture ours."[108]

In the end, however, the threats emanating from Morocco proved to be short-lived. Edward Preble soon landed in Tangier to enter into negotiations. He was accompanied by Richard O'Brien's successor, Tobias Lear. In concert with American consul James Simpson, an agreement was reached. The emperor "capitulated without conditions," and the original treaty of 1786 took effect once more.[109] The Emperor of Morocco wrote a letter to President Jefferson in which he acknowledged "some Vessels of each party were taken" but went on to

[103] John Rodgers to Richard V. Morris, June 30, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:466.
[104] "Extract from journal of Midshipman Henry Wadsworth," July 6, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:469.
[105] Morris was recalled soon after these events and subsequently subject to an investigation for his timid behavior. Perhaps, there was reluctance to award him the recognition for any major victories in this context.
[106] Irwin, *Diplomatic Relations*, 131.
[107] Edward Preble to Secretary of State, September 18, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:56.
[108] Ibid., III:58.
[109] Luella J. Hall, *The United States and Morocco, 1776–1956* (New York: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1971), 62.

state the events were "a matter of little consequence."[110] The emperor furthermore reassured that peaceful relations would continue from that point onward.

In a lengthy report, Edward Preble thus expressed an optimistic sentiment with regard to the situation in the Mediterranean. It seemed that in Morocco, the display of naval force had for once achieved its desired effect, and if warships would occasionally come to the ports of Morocco, Preble stated "we shall always be good friends with the Emperor."[111] There would be no action throughout the ensuing winter months, but come spring, Preble wrote, he was hopeful to "convince the Bashaw of Tripoli that it will be for his interest to have peace with us on our own terms."[112] Overall, however, naval operations had been largely stagnating during the greater part of 1803. While averting war with Morocco was interpreted favorably by American officers and diplomats, the conflict with Tripoli remained far from resolved.

Back in the United States, the war appears to have played only a secondary role for the President and his administration. In his annual message to Congress, Jefferson dedicated a single sentence to Mediterranean affairs in which he informed the legislators that small vessels have been sent as reinforcements to the American squadron. Most of his message focused on the Louisiana Purchase which was generally presented as a monumental achievement. Likewise, Jefferson commented on the outbreak of the Napoleonic wars, stating that the "flames of war lighted up again in Europe" while also reaffirming his commitment to stay out of European affairs.[113]

In December, Jefferson also sent a brief special message to Congress, informing the lawmakers that peace with Morocco had been reestablished. Earlier reports had arrived in the United States which claimed the emperor had declared war. While these events were entirely divorced from the conflict with Tripoli, it nevertheless "generated a surge of national pride, especially among Democratic-Republican newspapers."[114] In all, however, the Louisiana Purchase and Europe's descent into war was doubtless the focus of public attention in the United States by the end of 1803.

While both American naval commanders and the Jefferson administration had initially expressed optimism over the war with Tripoli, hopes for a peace settlement on American terms were soon shattered. In October of 1803, the *USS Philadelphia*, under the command of William Bainbridge, was chasing an enemy vessel off the coast of Tripoli. During the maneuver, the

[110] Emperor of Morocco to Thomas Jefferson, October 12, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:125.
[111] Edward Preble to [Presumably] the Secretary of the Navy, October 5, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:142.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Thomas Jefferson, "Annual Message to Congress," October 17, 1803, *PTJ*, 41:537.
[114] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 134.

frigate stranded on a patch of rocks near the Tripolitan harbor. Shortly thereafter, Tripolitans boarded the frigate. The crew surrendered and was taken to Tripoli as prisoners of war. Later, Tripolitans also managed to refloat the *Philadelphia* and bring the vessel into the harbor. The bashaw, now in possession of a powerful American frigate and 307 American prisoners, had greatly shifted the odds in his favor. One historian succinctly summarized the situation thusly: "The war was no longer a draw – Tripoli was winning."[115]

Virtually all Americans involved in the war with Tripoli agreed that the capture of the *Philadelphia* represented a new low point in the war with Tripoli. Soon, the decision to surrender the ship without a struggle was called into question by American sailors, diplomats, and naval officers.[116] Commodore Bainbridge's timid behavior was immediately contextualized within a normative framework of military honor. Within this framework, defending the ship at all costs – an action that could have resulted in the slaughter of most crew members – was repeatedly described as the only honorable course of action.

The idea of fighting the Tripolitan attackers over possession of the ship was even entertained by one of the *Philadelphia's* crew members. In his journal, a sailor named William Ray documented the events surrounding the seizure of the ship. On Bainbridge's decision to lower the American flag and thus signal surrender, he noted the following:

> Many of our seamen were much surprised at seeing the colors down before we had received any injury from the fire of our enemy and begged of the captain and officers to raise it again, preferring even death to slavery. The man who was at the ensign, halyards positively refused to obey the captain's orders when he was ordered to lower the flag. He was threatened to be run through, and a midshipman seized the halyards and executed the command, amidst the general murmuring of the crew.[117]

It is of course impossible to assess whether members of the crew did indeed refuse to obey their captain's order and even preferred to fight, and possibly die in battle, instead of becoming prisoners of war. Possibly, these lines were inserted after the fact to highlight the brave behavior of the crew and, by extension, the author.

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[115] Ibid., 143.

[116] Bainbridge's decision was even criticized by Europeans. A Dutch diplomat in Tripoli noted in his journal that "The Americans could have easily carried on fighting" and later wondered "what explanation can [Bainbridge] give for the surrender without a proper fight." Quoted in Victor Enthoven, "'From the Halls of Montezuma to the Shores of Tripoli:' Antoine Zuchet and the First Barbary War, 1801–1805" in *Rough Waters: American Involvement with the Mediterranean in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Silvia Marzagalli, James R. Sofka, and John J. McCusker (St. Johns, Newfoundland: International Maritime Economic History Association, 2010), 120, 121.

[117] William Ray, "Horrors of Slavery; Or The American Tars in Tripoli" in *Narratives of Barbary Captivity: Recollections of James Leander Cathcart, Jonathan Cowdery, and William Ray*, ed. Robert J. Allison (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 2007), 192.

Indeed, William Ray's journal was published only after his return to the United States. Given that the account was thus clearly written with a wider audience in mind, it may at first appear plausible that the author would aim to present himself (and perhaps the crew) in a favorable light. However, at the beginning of his account, Ray also outlined one of the reasons for his decision to publish the account. Ray stated that he intended to correct specific parts of the account of another crew member of the *Philadelphia*, Jonathan Cowdery. His journal had been published previously, and Ray, in some instances, inserted comments on certain events which both captives had experienced (though from different perspectives).

Now, the events surrounding the surrender of the ship were not part of this commentary. However, considering that Ray specifically set out to correct another publication with his writings would suggest that care was given in only reporting events that would not give rise to any additional controversy. After all, other captives, Captain Bainbridge, or even Cowdery might then also have responded to Ray's account, and, in turn, challenged his narrative. Given this background, it appears unlikely that Ray greatly exaggerated the crew's reaction to Bainbridge's order to give up the ship.

A possible explanation for the reported reluctance to carry out the captain's orders could lie in the crew members' preconceptions of Barbary slavery. Perhaps informed by either written Barbary captivity narratives (prone to exaggerations and falsehoods) or oral reports, some might have feared cruel treatment and thus preferred to actively resist the possibility of becoming a slave in Tripoli. As has been suggested in previous sections, enslavement entailed not only material hardship but also notions of shame, humiliation, and social stigma. As soldiers, the crew members of the *Philadelphia* were likely armed and thus – unlike Americans aboard merchant vessels – more than capable of attempting to resist capture by force.

In addition, North Africans were frequently characterized as inferior "barbarians" by those involved in the war with Tripoli. Even William Ray, in his description of being captured, described Tripolitans as "pusillanimous" and "vultures."[118] Given these prejudices, it might have appeared to the American soldiers that they perceived themselves to be capable of fending off the Tripolitans until the *Philadelphia* would be able to sail again.[119]

Lastly, there is also a strong possibility that some of the American soldiers contemplated the idea of preferring, "death to slavery," as Ray put it. The idea of achieving an honorable

[118] Ibid.

[119] In fact, Ray heavily implied that the *Philadelphia* had been given up too early: "There was only one gunboat that could bear upon us, although there were two more lying to leeward, between us and the shore, afraid to come nigher. It is true there were two or three more making ready and getting under way, but it was afterwards thought they would not have attempted to board us for that night; and by the next morning she was afloat!" See Ray, "Horrors of Slavery," 192.

death by dying in battle was routinely linked to notions not only of personal, but also national honor, not only by William Ray, but also a number of other Americans who commented on the surrender of the *Philadelphia*. Indeed, Edward Preble repeated the exact same words Ray had used in his report to the secretary of the navy: "I fear our national character will sustain an injury with the Barbarians. – Would to God, that the Officers and crew of the Philadelphia, had one and all, determined to prefer *death to slavery*; it is possible such a determination might have saved them from either."[120]

James Cathcart also contemplated the merits of defending the ship at all costs in a strikingly similar manner in his own report to the secretary of state. Cathcart not only linked personal sacrifice to the advancement of personal honor, he also contextualized the meaning of preferring death to slavery in a broader national context, when he wrote the following:

> How glorious it would have been to have perish'd with the Ship, but how apt are we all to prefer a precarious, nay an ignominious life of slavery to a glorious death which would transmit our names to posterity & have establish'd a national character which time could not efface; while humanity recoils at the idea of launching so many souls into eternity, every thing great glorious & patriotic dictates the measure & our national honor & pride demanded the sacrifice.[121]

Given his background as a former slave in Algiers, Cathcart's comment must have carried with it at least some connotation of a double standard or even outright hypocrisy.

Nevertheless, three different Americans of entirely different backgrounds – a sailor, an officer, and a diplomat – independently commented on the decision to surrender the *Philadelphia*, and all came to the same conclusion while employing an almost identical vocabulary.[122] The notion of preferring death in battle to life in slavery was presented as not merely feasible but as the only correct and honorable course of action in all three accounts. Furthermore, both Cathcart and Preble contextualized such a sacrifice within the broader context of national honor by alluding to the idea that such a battle would have established a "national character."

Even William Bainbridge preemptively addressed the option of not giving up the ship. In one of the first letters addressed to Edward Preble, he provided his perspective on the matter: "Some Fanatics may say that blowing the ship up would have been the proper result. I thought such conduct would not stand acquitted before God or Man, and I never presumed to think I had the liberty of putting to death the lives of 306 Souls because they were placed under my

[120] Emphasis added. Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, December 10, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:256.
[121] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, December 15, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:272.
[122] As has been discussed previously, William Eaton also expressed a similar sentiment on the *George Washington* incident.

command."[123] Unsurprisingly, the captain emphasized the responsibility entrusted on him to protect his crew as a defense. But it remains notable that Bainbridge immediately addressed his decision, even before any person outside of Tripoli had even accused him of cowardice.

Bainbridge furthermore suggested that some of his crew might be redeemed as British subjects. He reported that "the greater part of our crew" were Britons and had not been naturalized in the United States. He suggested that the famous Admiral Horatio Nelson, who was then also sailing the Mediterranean, might claim them. Bainbridge argued that "Interest, and Humanity, would (in my opinion) sanction an aquiesence."[124] Once more, he emphasized his responsibility for the physical welfare of his crew by all means necessary.

However, the commander of the American troops, Edward Preble, offered a vastly different perspective. In a letter addressed directly to the crew of the *Philadelphia*, he appealed to the soldiers' sense of personal honor and ordered the men to accept their fate with dignity: "Altho' the fortune of War has made you prisoners to the Bashaw of Tripoly, it has not made you his Slaves – Whether you will be Slaves or Not, depends on yourselves . . . Behave like Americans be firm and do not despair the time of your liberation is not far distant."[125] Clearly, Edward Preble considered the prisoners to be an exclusively American problem which did not warrant foreign interference, least of all by the British.[126] Similar to the cooperation with Sweden earlier, to rely on the aid of foreign countries implied that the United States was incapable of independently winning against Tripoli.

Apart from these hypothetical considerations of how the *Philadelphia* might have been saved and how American prisoners of war should behave, the loss of one frigate resulted in more immediate strategic disadvantages as well. Negotiating a new peace treaty on terms perceived as honorable to the United States would now be all but impossible. For the United States, this represented a delicate situation, because if a peace settlement would be reached on Tripoli's terms, this might result in a ripple effect, leading to new demands by all of the remaining Barbary States. Needless to say, this would stand in direct opposition to the aim of presenting the United States as an independent and honorable country within the Mediterranean community.

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[123] William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, November 12, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:174.
[124] William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, December 5, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:253.
[125] Edward Preble, "Edward Preble to the Warrant and Petty Officers, Seamen and Marines of the U.S. Frigate *Philadelphia*," January 4, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:312.
[126] It was later pointed out that Admiral Nelson did not show any interest in redeeming the captives, even if given the chance. It was reported that "if [Nelson] done anything in the Business, it would be to have the Rascels all hung." See John Johnson to William W. Burrows, January 24, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:357.

When George Davis, who had replaced William Eaton in Tunis, learned of the capture of the *Philadelphia*, his assessment of the situation was pessimistic: "The die is cast – we are doomed to unconditional tribute with every part of Barbary."[127] Richard O'Brien stated that a peace treaty at this point would be "giving Algiers and Tunis a bounty to demand extra terms, and would convince Tripoly that we could not contend with them."[128] Tobias Lear, O'Brien's replacement as new consul general in Algiers, agreed that acquiescence to Tripolitan terms would come "with a certainty of having demands increase upon us from the other powers."[129] Lastly, James Cathcart offered a similar prediction, even stating that a costly peace with Tripoli would result in declarations of war by both Tunis and Algiers, unless their new and increased demands were met as well.[130] In all, virtually all diplomats concerned with Barbary relations agreed that the United States was at a decided disadvantage in any upcoming negotiations with the bashaw.

There was likewise consensus that the United States, despite this disadvantage, would not enter into any treaty deemed dishonorable. It was soon reported that the new price for a peace treaty now stood at $500,000, a sum so vast that Tobias Lear, the designated negotiator, virtually immediately deemed it "out of the question" to agree to it.[131] Preble agreed. He acknowledged that as things stood, the proposed terms were comparable to Sweden and Denmark. On such terms, "we never ought to accede," he noted.[132]

Once more, James Cathcart stood out with his remarks on a possible treaty. In a letter to William Bainbridge, he informed the captain that his captivity would likely last for an extended period of time, if he were to lead the negotiation with the bashaw:

> The idea that the United States will ever conclude a peace with Tripoli upon dishonorable terms ought to be treated with contempt . . . I have been eleven years in captivity myself & yet I solemnly declare that before I would see my Country obliged to accede to all the impositions which will be the consequence of concluding a precipitate peace with Tripoli that I would suffer to undergo as long a captivity again & would glory in my chains.[133]

In this passage, Cathcart attempted to console Bainbridge by suggesting that it was preferable to remain in captivity if redemption was not achieved by means that were honorable to the United States. Personal honor, he suggested, had be sacrificed in subservience to the nation.

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[127] George Davis to Richard O'Brien, November 17, 1803, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 7, NARA.
[128] Richard O'Brien to Edward Preble, December 21, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:284.
[129] Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, December 24, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:292.
[130] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, December 15, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:272
[131] Tobias Lear to Edward Preble, December 21, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:285.
[132] Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, January 17, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:337.
[133] James Cathcart to William Bainbridge, January 23, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:354

While Cathcart's sentiment might at first seem like a somewhat cold-hearted consolation in the face of captivity, Bainbridge and his officers were treated fairly well during their stay in Tripoli. Shortly after his arrival, Bainbridge wrote to his wife and stated that "my position in prison is entirely supportable – I have found here kind and generous friends."[134] Even the term "prison" was somewhat of an exaggeration as Bainbridge occupied Cathcart's consular house.[135] Moreover, he was able to write frequent letters to his fellow naval officers and even took over some diplomatic work. Overall, "Bainbridge was able to maintain his importance and dignity as a man of affairs, acting in essence as American consul to Tripoli."[136] Most of his crew, on the other hand, was relegated to living in prison and forced to hard labor on a daily basis.

Aside from diplomatic obstacles, the capture of the *Philadelphia* also impacted the war with Tripoli from a military standpoint. For one, the United States had lost one of its most powerful ships which was now in the possession of the enemy. No doubt, it would have been perceived as extremely humiliating for the United States, if the US Navy would be forced to fight part of its own fleet in the Mediterranean. According to Tobias Lear, the Tripolitan port could not fully accommodate the *Philadelphia*, so it seemed more likely that the regency of Algiers would buy the ship.[137] However, considering that relations with all Barbary States appeared to be in decline at the time, this might have only deferred these gloomy prospects.

Furthermore, the incident once again proved the inefficacy of the US naval blockade. Porous from the start, the stranding of the *Philadelphia* showed that blockading the Tripolitan port was even more difficult than it was heretofore assumed. William Bainbridge assessed the situation thusly: "A blockade has, and ever will be found a wrong system to pursue with this Regency; it is only hazarding a great risque (as I have fatally experienced) without the least effect."[138] Small cruisers, he argued, would continue to pour out of Tripoli's harbor. Moreover, he stressed that Tripoli was growing enough crops to be self-sufficient and furthermore capable of receiving supplies by land from Tunis.[139] With the conflict in its third year, it had become abundantly clear that some grandiose show of force would not suffice to overawe the enemy; Americans were faced with a formidable adversary, and after the capture of the *Philadelphia*,

[134] William Bainbridge to Susan Bainbridge, November 1, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:178.
[135] William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, February 16, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:409.
[136] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 155.
[137] Tobias Lear to Edward Preble, December 21, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:285. Bainbridge suggested the same, stating that "the Frigate *Philadelphia* will be offered to Tunis or Algiers." William Bainbridge to [presumably] Edward Preble, February 15, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:408.
[138] William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, December 5, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:253–254.
[139] Ibid. See also William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, January 14, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:330.

losing the conflict had not only become a real possibility, it threatened to further embarrass the United States on the international stage.

Given these circumstances, William Bainbridge considered extreme measures to force Tripoli into submission, namely a full-fledged invasion by land: "The Bashaw will never be forced to terms [unless] he considers his own safety endangered; and he is only Vulnerable to the United States [in] one way; that is by eight or ten thousand men landing near his Town, which in my Opinion would soon become an easy conquest." [140] In a separate letter, Bainbridge revised his assessment, stating that if the bashaw's demands would be too unreasonable, "I would recommend an attack by land about night. A thousand troops would do."[141] Because the number of troops Bainbridge recommended for his expedition differed substantially in the two letters, Bainbridge's assessment should be treated with some skepticism.

This notwithstanding, Bainbridge's recommendation to invade Tripoli by land represents a radical departure from the previous approach to awe the Barbary States into submission by merely displaying the American navy in the Mediterranean. Considering that Bainbridge recommended an invasion on two separate occasions also indicates that he did not plan this attack in the spur of the moment but instead carefully considered the ramifications of such an endeavor. In all, the plan may be regarded as a reaction to Tripoli's advantageous position at this point during the war which, in turn, called for increasingly aggressive actions if a treaty that was deemed dishonorable was to be avoided.

To respond to the capture of the *Philadelphia* with swift and decisive action also carried weight, because the war against Tripoli was perceived to have a wide audience. In a letter to Edward Preble, James Cathcart situated the war within the greater context of world history and emphasized that the result would set a precedent with ramifications for the Barbary Coast and beyond:

> All Europe as well as Barbary has view'd our conduct in silent expectation, since the war with Tripoli commenced, the former with an intention to follow our example if worthy [of] imitation, & the latter to know how to rank us among the nations of the earth, whether to class us with Great Britain and France the only nations who make themselves respected, or with the northern nations whose miserable pusilanimous aconomy has so far preponderated in their Councils as to induce them in many instances to sacrifice their national dignity[142]

For the consul, the stakes were high; the war would set a precedent for years to come, and, as previous demands had already indicated, the Bashaw of Tripoli currently classed the United

[140] William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, January 14, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:330.
[141] William Bainbridge to [presumably] Edward Preble, *Naval Documents*, III:408.
[142] James Cathcart to Edward Preble, November 18, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:229.

States alongside countries like Sweden and Denmark. The United States had to score a decisive victory to ascend the international hierarchy. Simultaneously, the American situation at the time likely reminded the leaders of European nations why paying annual tribute was preferable to war with the Barbary States.

The loss of the *Philadelphia* had exposed American weaknesses on many levels. It had suggested American cowardice, most prominently displayed by William Bainbridge's decision to give up the ship without a fight, against a supposedly inferior enemy. The loss had also put the United States at a distinct disadvantage from a diplomatic standpoint, because now the bashaw had in his possession 307 American prisoners of war, who, if redeemed, would likely expose the United States to new demands by the remaining Barbary States. Lastly, the loss of a powerful frigate also negatively impacted the war from a strategic standpoint. Withing the framework of national honor, the United States was perceived to have reached a new low.

**1804: Asserting Honor through American Naval Strength**

Given the situation, Edward Preble was incentivized to respond quickly. Only a few months after the capture of the *Philadelphia*, a Lieutenant named Stephen Decatur was tasked with a mission to destroy the frigate. On February 16, 1804, after some delays due to unfavorable weather conditions, Decatur and his crew succeeded in infiltrating the Tripolitan harbor and setting fire to the *Philadelphia*. Americans suffered no casualties, whereas an numerous Tripolitans were killed during the mission. One Tripolitan was reportedly taken prisoner. The mission was celebrated as a decisive American victory, and Decatur was celebrated as one of the conflict's greatest heroes.

A few firsthand accounts confirm certain details of the mission. Two naval officers – Stephen Decatur himself and a soldier named Ralph Izard – reported that approximately twenty Tripolitans were killed after Americans boarded the *Philadelphia*, the latter stating they were "cut to pieces."[143] Edward Preble later confirmed that "not a musket or Pistol was fired on our side, every thing [was done] by the sword or tomawhawk."[144] Furthermore, Preble hinted at the possibility that the true number of casualties might be even higher than what had been confirmed: "It is presumed some Tripolines perished in the flames, and many drowned."[145] In all, the reports of those involved in Decatur's mission suggest a surprise attack at night during

[143] Ralph Izard to Mrs Ralph Izard, February 20, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:417.
[144] Edward Preble to Tobias Lear, February 19, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:442.
[145] Ibid.

which any resisting Tripolitans were quickly executed in order to prevent widespread alarm in the harbor.

Indeed, there is even some evidence to suggest that Tripolitans were killed after they had already surrendered. Whereas Izard and Decatur wrote their reports in the days after the raid, there remains an account by a surgeon's mate named Lewis Heerman. This version of events was written as late as the 1820s, one and a half decades after the destruction of the *Philadelphia*. One of Heerman's extant accounts took the form of an affidavit which was written in 1828 in connection with a request by Stephen Decatur's wife for financial relief.[146] Under oath, Heerman attested that soon after boarding the frigate, noise from the fighting had caught the attention of nearby Tripolitans aboard two ships. These were now quickly approaching, leaving "an interval of time just sufficient to execute the order which grew out of it – 'of killing all prisoners.'"[147] A second account by Heerman contained a similar statement.[148]

The Tripolitan casualties caused a minor controversy. The bashaw's minister of foreign affairs took issue with the conduct of US sailors during the mission. In a letter to William Bainbridge, it was notably a Tripolitan who pointed to the inhumane behavior of Americans: "The Commodore [Edward Preble] speaks much of humanity in his letter, he is however far from the practice of it, since three of the Guards of the Frigate have been found dead on the shores between Tripoly and Mesurat covered with wounds. How long has it been since Nations massacred their Prisoners?"[149] The letter shows that Tripolitans shared American conceptions when it came to the respective "other's" conduct and character. Both sides accused each other of barbaric behavior. The letter heavily implied that it was the Americans who disregarded the established rules of warfare at the time.

Moreover, the Tripolitan minister called into question the honor of the American naval commander in alleging that a massacre had taken place. On the same day he received the letter, Bainbridge took it on himself to respond and defend Decatur's mission:

> With your consent I have enclosed to the Commodore a translation of your letter to me, who no doubt will be able to explain clearly to you that the death of the men you allude to, does not merit the appellation of *Massacre*, but was occasioned by a necessary consequence in making their escape . . . it is an

[146] The request was issued after Decatur had already died.
[147] Lewis Heerman, "Affidavit of Surgeon's Mate Lewis Heerman," April 26, 1828, *Naval Documents*, III:418.
[148] For a thorough discussion on this detail of Decatur's mission, see Frederick C. Leiner, "Killing the Prisoners: What did Decatur Order in Tripoli Harbor?" *U.S. Naval Institute*, https://www.usni.org/magazines/naval-history-magazine/2018/december/killing-prisoners-what-did-decatur-order-tripoli. Accessed September 3, 2020.
[149] Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Bashaw of Tripoli to Edward Preble, March 5, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:474.

> incontrovertable fact, that the Americans always treat their Prisoners with the greatest humanity and give quarters the moment opposition ceases.[150]

Forwarding the letter to Preble himself (as well as responding immediately) shows that William Bainbridge considered the minister's accusation to be a profoundly serious one which called for instant mitigation.

After Edward Preble learned about the minister's complaints, he chose to address the controversy as well. In a letter to Bainbridge, the commodore stated that all Tripolitan prisoners of war were treated well and invited the minister to send an emissary to come aboard his ship to verify his claims.[151] "After such an enquiry he will not have reason to accuse me of a want of humanity," Preble wrote.[152] On the Tripolitan casualties during Decatur's raid, Preble commented "I regret that any lives were lost in destroying the Frigate." However, he also stressed that those killed "had a right to expect their fate from the opposition they made, and the alarm they endeavoured to create." More generally, Preble furthermore emphasized the risks of being a soldier in times of war: "People who handle dangerous weapons in War, must expect wounds and Death." Lastly, Preble claimed that none of the naval officers involved in the mission had "reported to me any act of Massacre or inhumanity," and he concluded that he would never "countenance or encourage wanton acts of Cruelty."[153]

According to the French chargé d'affaires in Tripoli (acting as a temporary mediator for the United States) the bashaw expressed a desire to verify the commodore's claims. There was a simple way to achieve this. Preble was asked to release the single prisoner that had been taken during Decatur's raid, "in order to interogate him freely, as it respects the treatment he received – also that of his Comrades, and destroy the general Credited opinion among the inhabitants that they have been Massacred."[154] However, Edward Preble sailed for Tunis shortly after the French chargé d'affaires had forwarded the bashaw's request. In his diary, Preble noted that it was necessary to show force and thereby prevent a declaration of war by that regency.[155] When Preble returned to the vicinity of Tripoli at the end of May – some two months later – the issue

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[150] To "give quarter" refers to the practice of taking prisoners. William Bainbridge to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Bashaw of Tripoli, March 5, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:475.

[151] A Tripolitan ship, the *Mastico* (later renamed *Intrepid* and used to infiltrate the Tripolitan harbor), had previously been captured by the American navy. The prize's crew was comprised of persons with numerous nationalities, but a number of Tripolitans were among them and taken as prisoners of war. For a more detailed account of the capture, see Zacks, *The Pirate Coast*, 75–76.

[152] Edward Preble to William Bainbridge, March 12, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:489.

[153] Ibid.

[154] French Chargé d'Affaires and Commissary General, Tripoli to Edward Preble, March 28, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:543.

[155] Edward Preble, "Extract from Diary," April 1, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:17.

was seemingly dropped.[156] Even during direct negotiations that took place later that year, the Tripolitan prisoner was not mentioned again in the diplomatic correspondence.

Some evidence suggests that the prisoner died shortly after Decatur's mission. In a letter dated February 20, four days after the raid, Ralph Izard, who had been part of the mission, stated "We have taken one poor creature who I am afraid will not recover."[157] The date of the letter might suggest that the prisoner had survived at least up until that point.[158] The death of a single Tripolitan prisoner was unlikely to elicit any comment, and extant ship logs make no mention of any deaths occurring.[159] If the prisoner had indeed died, this would seemingly confirm the cruel treatment of Tripolitan prisoners of war by the Americans. If he was still alive, he might confirm that a massacre had taken place. Either way, ignoring the bashaw's request was likely the most effective strategy to avoid tainting the reputation of the United States.

In retrospect, it may appear somewhat surprising that the minister's passing remarks elicited such vociferous responses by both William Bainbridge and Edward Preble. Both justified the conduct of the Americans during the mission in no uncertain terms. However, when interpreted as a pointed attack on the personal honor of naval hero Stephen Decatur (and by extension, his superior, Edward Preble) as well as US national honor more generally, the minister' accusation gained significance for those it affected. It appears that for Preble and Bainbridge, the war's second important victory (after the *Enterprise's* encounter with the *Tripoli*) had to be defended as an honorable one. Rumors about the execution of prisoners of war certainly would have challenged that narrative, thereby threatening the honor of the United States more broadly. There is no evidence to suggest that any formal inquiry was ever launched by Edward Preble to investigate the minister's claims.

The allegation was thus successfully contained from spreading outside of Tripoli, and Decatur's mission received widespread recognition throughout the rest of the Mediterranean and beyond. For example, the U.S. navy agent at Messina wrote a letter to Edward Preble in which he told the commodore that he would publish the news in a local newspaper. He stated

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[156] In a second letter, the French Chargé d'affaires stated that he had not heard from Preble since the first letter (dated March 28) but did not mention anything pertaining to the Tripolitan prisoner.

[157] Ralph Izard to Mrs. Ralph Izard, February 20, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:417.

[158] In addition, on February 19, Edward Preble confirmed that "we made but one prisoner," suggesting that the person in question was still alive then. See Edward Preble to James Cathcart, February 19, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:438.

[159] Tripolitan prisoners of war were occasionally mentioned when they were transferred to other ships. At one point, Edward Preble also complained that he had too many prisoners aboard his ship and solicited the Neapolitan government to keep them at Syracuse. The prisoner taken aboard the *Philadelphia*, however, is never singularly identified in these mentions. See "Extract from log book kept by Sailing Master Nathaniel Harden, *USS Constitution*," February 28, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:462. See also Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, March 11, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:485.

that "Atchievments of this nature cannot be too well known; it will have a good effect on the Court of Naples."[160] In Gibraltar, the American consul stated that he published the news to "make other states look about."[161] Similarly, the U.S. Consul in Livorno provided the U.S. Minister to Paris with a graphic (and somewhat aggregated) account of the *Philadelphia's* destruction.[162] From Algiers, Tobias Lear wrote a letter to the American consul in Lisbon which included a similar account.[163]

These efforts to portray the United States as having turned the tide in the war appeared to be successful for a time, as they evoked comments from several esteemed European individuals. The virtually universally respected Lord Nelson called Decatur's accomplishment "the most bold and daring act of the age" and Pope Pius VII commented that the US Navy had "done more for the cause of Christianity than the most powerful nations of Christendom have done for ages."[164] There appeared to be almost unanimous consent that the United States had advanced its reputation among European countries.

Decatur's mission was also met with near universal appraisal when the news reached the United States in May of 1804. Decatur was celebrated as "the great hero of Tripoli,"[165] and newspaper coverage was overwhelmingly positive.[166] Decatur was promoted to the rank of captain, Congress awarded him a commemorative sword and gave all of those involved in the burning of the *Philadelphia* an additionally two months' salary.[167] Overall "the American public deemed it a monumental accomplishment and one of their country's finest victories."[168]

In his fourth annual message to Congress, Thomas Jefferson notably did not single out Decatur's heroism. Instead, there was a vague reference to "activity and success of the small force employed in the Mediterranean in the early part of the present year" without any further specifics.[169] Perhaps, Jefferson considered it prudent not to remind the members of Congress

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[160] John Broadbent to Edward Preble, March 6, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:478.
[161] John Gavino to Secretary of State, March 22, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:515.
[162] He overstated the number of Americans involved, writing that "an hundred well armed Americans leaped on board, cutting down every one who opposed them." See Thomas Appleton to Robert R. Livingston, March 16, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:494.
[163] Tobias Lear to William Jarvis, March 16, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:494–495.
[164] Quoted in Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America and the Middle East to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 60.
[165] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 155.
[166] Democratic-Republican newspapers generally celebrated Decatur's mission in connecting his success to Jefferson's leadership, whereas Federalist publications attempted to portray the naval officers as members of their party. For an extensive discussion on public reactions to the burning of the *Philadelphia*, see Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 168–178. See also, Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 158–162.
[167] Secretary of the Navy to Edward Preble, May 22, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:427, "Concerning the burning of the former U.S. Frigate *Philadelphia*," November 27, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:428.
[168] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 168.
[169] Thomas Jefferson, "Fourth Annual Message to Congress, November 8, 1804," *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jeffmes4.asp. Accessed February 15, 2021.

(and Americans generally) that the war had proceeded into the fourth year while over 300 Americans remained captive in Tripoli. After all, Jefferson's message was delivered on the eve of that year's presidential election.

Shortly after the mission, many Americans expressed hope that the Bashaw of Tripoli would lower his demands for a new treaty. In June of 1804, Richard O'Brien, acting as temporary negotiator, was sent to Tripoli to offer the bashaw $40,000 for the ransom of the 300[170] American prisoners and peace. Unsurprisingly, the offer was rejected by the bashaw who reportedly "felt himself offended" by so low a sum.[171] Later, Edward Preble even authorized as much as $50,000 with another $10,000 reserved for consular presents. In a letter, Preble stated these were "generous terms," especially when "considering our means of annoying him" – likely a reference to Decatur's raid.[172] Nevertheless, the Bashaw of Tripoli persisted in rejecting all American overtures for peace.

From a strictly strategic standpoint, the bashaw's decision to reject the comparatively low price for peace appears unsurprising. While Americans celebrated Stephen Decatur's mission as an enormous success, all the mission effectively achieved was the destruction of an American frigate. Of course, this meant the bashaw could no longer sell the ship, but 300 American prisoners of war remained captive in Tripoli. Tripoli remained well situated to fend off any American attacks by sea, and the *Philadelphia* had exposed the risks of a continuous blockade. In all, the situation had hardly changed from the Tripolitan perspective, and after the bashaw had demanded $500,000 for a peace treaty, $50,000 constituted a relatively insignificant sum.

In this sense, there was a disconnect between the American and European reactions to Decatur's mission and the state of affairs at the time. One historian remarked "there was something odd about the extensive celebration of the *Philadelphia's* destruction."[173] A possible explanation for the near unanimous positive interpretation of Americans destroying their own ship lies in the theatric nature of the mission. It was perceived as daring, the Americans involved could easily be described as brave, and not a single man was lost. Moreover, the mission ended with the spectacle of an enormous fire right within the enemy harbor. The mission constituted more of a story with a clearly defined protagonist (Decatur) and as such could be published in newspapers, retold, and sometimes exaggerated. In this context, Decatur and his mission were

[170] By April, a few Americans had turned "renegado," i.e. converted to Islam, two had died. See William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, April 3, 1803, *Naval Documents*, IV:4.
[171] French Chargé d'Affaires and Commissary General, Tripoli to Edward Preble, June 12, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:184.
[172] Edward Preble to William Bainbridge, June 19, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:205.
[173] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 179.

utilized to promote US efforts against the Barbary States throughout the Mediterranean and the United States.

In the late summer of 1804, the American squadron under Edward Preble intensified the operations against Tripoli. Since the bashaw had rejected his offers for peace in June, it seems that Preble now wished to prove he had the "means of annoying him," as he had put it previously.[174] In early August, Americans on small vessels repeatedly sailed near the coastlines, directly engaged with enemy ships, and bombarded the fortified batteries as well as the city itself. During one of these raids, the brother of Stephen Decatur, James Decatur, was killed. He was reportedly shot dead, after having boarded an enemy vessel. According to some publications, Decatur took revenge during another minor skirmish in which he killed the captain who had shot his brother.[175]

The details of James Decatur's death, as told by Americans at the time, emphasized the perfidy of the enemy. As Edward Preble later recounted, Decatur "was treacherously shot through the head by the captain of the boat that had surrendered, which base conduct enabled the poltroon . . . to escape."[176] This description once more points toward the purported dishonorable conduct by the enemy. Unlike the Americans, the Tripolitans allegedly did not adhere to the rules of warfare, in this case to cease fighting after having surrendered. Moreover, the commander here stressed that Decatur was shot, suggesting that he had no means of defending himself against the attack. As Preble concluded, "[Decatur's] conduct in the action was highly honorable, and he *died nobly*."[177]

James Decatur was the only person killed during that day's operations, and the naval officers involved were quick to emphasize the brave conduct of their sailors and declared that the US had achieved a decisive victory. Edward Preble described his men as "brave tars" who had fought honorably with "pistol, sabre, pike, and tomahawk."[178] The bravery of American seamen was contrasted with the supposedly inferior enemy. As Stephen Decatur put it, "Some

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[174] Edward Preble to William Bainbridge, June 19, 1804, Naval Documents, IV:205.
[175] See, for example, Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States at War*, 122, Whipple, *To the Shores of Tripoli*, 155, Kilmeade and Yaeger, *Jefferson and the Tripoli Pirates*, 182–184. However, the evidence for Decatur's actions is somewhat unreliable. Kitzen, for example, cites as proof for Decatur's revenge an extract of *Life of Stephen Decatur* by Alexander Slidell MacKenzie as published in *Naval Documents*. See Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States at War*, 191 and "Extract from 'Life of Stephen Decatur'," *Naval Documents*, IV:347. The book cited in *Naval Documents*, however, was published in 1846, twenty-six years after Decatur's death and forty-two years after the events in question. Its version of events relied on a second-hand account, and it is even noted that "this celebrated struggle . . . has in other places been narrated somewhat differently." See asterisk to "Extract from 'Life of Stephen Decatur'," *Naval Documents*, IV:348. More importantly, neither Edward Preble, Stephen Decatur, nor any other sailors commented on Decatur avenging his brother at the time. Clearly, if the purported events had taken place, it would have been talked about at the time and solidified Decatur's status as a war hero.
[176] Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, September 18, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:295.
[177] Ibid., IV:297
[178] Ibid., IV:295.

of the Turks died like men, but much the greater number like women."[179] An estimated fifty Tripolitans were killed. "Never was there a more complete victory – to recount every instance of personal bravery would be to name almost every officer in the squadron," another naval officer commented.[180] Later, the Americans suffered a minor setback, when a gunboat exploded, killing ten sailors. But overall, Americans were expressing optimistic sentiments during the first days of August.

Some Americans contextualized their actions within an international framework of reference. Utilizing gunboats and engaging in hand-to-hand combat against Tripoli was considered an unusual but innovative strategy. When European countries fought the Barbary States, their navies typically bombarded the cities from afar. One naval officer wrote that he did not believe that "any other nation except the Americans would have attempted it with the same force, not even the British nation with all their skill in Naval Tacticks . . . no nation cou'd have done more than Commodore Preble with the same force."[181] These comments indicate that the American mode of warfare was considered uniquely aggressive compared to precedents set by Europeans.

Under these seemingly favorable conditions, Preble decided again to enter into negotiations. Likely, the rationale behind the negotiations was that the American exhibition of strength would induce the bashaw to come to terms. On August 9, Edward Preble once more sent Richard O'Brien ashore to offer a total of $80,000 for the redemption of the crew of the *Philadelphia* and peace – twice the amount from earlier that year. Another $10,000 were offered in consular presents. The bashaw refused. The French chargé d'affaires reported that he expected $200,000 to 300,000 and was "bent upon continuing the war."[182] Tripoli's terms for peace remained comparable to those of Sweden two years prior.

In a second concession to the bashaw, Edward Preble proposed to pay up to $100,000. Simultaneously, he issued a warning that if this "generous offer" was not accepted, he could "reduce Tripoli to a heap of Ruins: the destruction of Derna & Bengaza will follow."[183] Despite these threats, the sum offered by Preble points to an awareness that the United States was at a negotiating disadvantage, especially with regard to the 300 American prisoners. Previously, Edward Preble had declared repeatedly the intention to have the Tripolitans "sue for peace" and

[179] Stephen Decatur to Keith Spence, January 9, 1804 [1805], *Naval Documents*, IV:346.
[180] Noadiah Morris to whom not indicated, September 7, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:354.
[181] "Extract from journal kept by Purser John Darby," *USS John Adams*, August 7, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:385.
[182] French Chargé d'Affaires and Commissary General, Tripoli to Edward Preble, August 10, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:393.
[183] Edward Preble to French Chargé d'Affaires and Commissary General, Tripoli, August 11, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:397.

then dictate his own terms.[184] Now, the commander implored the bashaw to accept comparatively charitable conditions for peace – twice. The bashaw still refused to accept Preble's second offer, and the bombardment of Tripoli by gunboats was resumed throughout the rest of August.

The disparity in descriptions of the bombardment's impact on the city of Tripoli may help explain why the American overtures for peace were still refused. Americans aboard the US frigates off the coast frequently speculated that the damage done to the city was enormous. Preble conjectured that "the town must have suffered much from this attack [and] must have lost many men."[185] Another sailor likewise commented that "the commodore gave them several other broadsides which did greate injury to their battary and the houses on shore."[186] To attack the city and its batteries directly constituted an important aspect to the American strategy. It was presumed that the destruction would pressure the bashaw into accepting the offers for peace.

However, accounts from residents in Tripoli (both diplomats and prisoners of war) differed in their assessment of the damage inflicted by the gunboats. Jonathan Cowdery, a former crew member of the *Philadelphia,* noted in his journal that the shelling of the city was largely ineffective: "the houses being principally built of stone, mud, and mortar, the fire did but little damage."[187] Another American captive, William Ray, likewise commented that "as few of the shells burst on shore, not so great execution was done as might be expected or as has been reported."[188] A similar report was issued by the French chargé d'affaires in Tripoli.[189] A Danish consul furthermore asserted that "the bombardement & canonade have not had the effect sufficient to force the Bashaw, who, dont care much about his Town or his Subjects' life."[190] These accounts indicate that Americans on their ships off Tripoli overestimated the effects of their actions. "Although Preble's attacks on the town appeared impressive, they accomplished little."[191]

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[184] Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, December 10, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:257, Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, February 19, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:439, Edward Preble to Robert R. Livingston, March 18, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:499.
[185] Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, September 18, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:300.
[186] "Extract from a journal kept by Purser John Darby," *USS John Adams*, August 28, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:476.
[187] Jonathan Cowdery, "American Captives in Tripoli" in *Narratives of Barbary Captivity: Recollections of James Leander Cathcart, Jonathan Cowdery, and William Ray*, ed. Robert J. Allison (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 2007), 145.
[188] Ray, "Horrors of Slavery," 261.
[189] French Chargé d'Affaires and Commissary General, Tripoli to Edward Preble, August 29, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:482.
[190] Nicholas C. Nissen to George Davis, September 1, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:495.
[191] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 187.

By the end of August, the American squadron was preparing to further intensify the actions against Tripoli. For this purpose, the *Intrepid* – the ship that had been used previously on the mission to destroy the *Philadelphia* – was fitted out to be a so-called infernal. The mission was to infiltrate the harbor of Tripoli with a ship filled with explosives and then detonate the vessel to destroy or damage nearby enemy ships.[192] Fuses would allow the crew enough time to abandon the ship and rejoin the American squadron. On September 3, Richard Somers and twelve sailors embarked on this mission which was perceived to be extremely courageous. However, the operation ended prematurely, as the ship exploded for unknown reasons before reaching its destination. The entire crew was killed.

Immediately, it was assumed that the explosion had been intentional. Prior to the mission, Somers allegedly said to his fellow sailors "that no man need accompany him, who had not come to the resolution to blow himself up, rather than be captured," to which the crew reportedly gave three cheers.[193] This provided for the possibility that the Americans had willingly perished with the ship. One naval officer therefore suggested "they were attempted to be boarded by the Tripolitans and blew her up sooner than suffer her & themselves to fall into the hands of the Tripoleens."[194] Another midshipman commented that, while waiting for the return of the crew, it occurred to him that "the fearful alternative – of blowing themselves up, rather than be captured – so bravely determined upon . . . had been as bravely put into execution."[195] Edward Preble later recounted the events in almost theatrical fashion: "the gallant Somers and heroes of his party, observing the other three boats surrounding them, and no prospects of escape, determined at once, to prefer *death* and the *destruction of the enemy* to *captivity* and *torturing slavery*, put a match to the train leading directly to the magazine which at once blew the whole into the air and terminated their existence."[196]

While the cause for the explosion remains unknown, there is reason to be skeptical of the idea that the *Intrepid* was on the verge of being boarded and then willfully destroyed. In his journal, the captive Jonathan Cowdery noted that "the Turks found ten dead men near the place where the vessel blew up."[197] Presumably, the Americans would choose to detonate the ship in the immediate vicinity of an enemy vessel which would greatly increase the number of

[192] Preparations for this mission began in late August. See "Extract from log book kept by Sailing Master Nathaniel Haraden" *USS Constitution*, August 29, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:483.
[193] "Blowing up of U.S. Ketch *Intrepid* described by Midshipman Charles G. Ridgely" September 4, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:508.
[194] "Extract from journal kept by Purser John Darby," September 3, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:506.
[195] "Blowing up of U.S. Ketch *Intrepid* described by Midshipman Charles G. Ridgely" September 4, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:509.
[196] Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, September 18, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:306.
[197] Cowdery, "American Captives in Tripoli," 157.

casualties. Since the *Intrepid* had a crew of thirteen, the number provided by Cowdery roughly coincided with the casualties one would expect to find from an accident. Moreover, Cowdery did not mention a second damaged vessel of any kind. Instead, he noted that "the bashaw and his people had a thanksgiving to Mahomet on the occasion," suggesting the Tripolitans considered the explosion a victory.[198] While the evidence is circumstantial, it appears more likely that the explosion was not intentional.

This notwithstanding, Richard Somers and his crew were soon declared heroes of the Tripolitan War. When news of Somer's mission reached the United Sates, "American newspapers extolled the *Intrepid* crew as martyrs to a just war and as embodiments of the finest American ideals."[199] Of course, the most important aspect to the crew's legacy was having chosen death over slavery. Later, some publications also claimed that over a hundred Tripolitans had died when Somers had detonated the explosives and thus presented the mission as a resounding victory.[200] Likely, as often happened in maritime narratives at the time, rumors spread after the fact which greatly exaggerated the mission's accomplishments.

In an article that focuses exclusively on the *Intrepid* mission, the historian Robert Cray has concluded that the contemporary interpretations of the *Intrepid* mission were largely fabricated. He found that "naval men fashioned an explanation based on fragmentary evidence, considerable speculation, and heart-felt emotions to construct a proper ending for an undeniably courageous officer and his men."[201] This constructed narrative around Somers thus provided another convenient occasion for Americans to venerate the heroic conduct of their sailors.[202] And since there were no survivors, this version of events could not be challenged.[203]

In many ways, the reception of Somers' mission was similar to the destruction of the *Philadelphia*. In both instances, Americans greatly exaggerated the accomplishments of an operation that did not bring about any palpable strategic advantages. However, the dramaturgic components of the two incidents may help explain why the American reception of these operations was overwhelmingly positive. Both missions culminated in gigantic fires and could be used to describe the bravery exhibited by newly emergent national heroes and martyrs. From

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[198] Ibid.
[199] Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 192.
[200] Ibid., 191–197.
[201] Robert E. Cray, "Remembering Richard Somers: Naval Martyrdom in the Tripolitan War," *The Historian* 68 (2006): 268.
[202] As Cray further argues, the death of Somers and his crew were particularly exceptional, because dying in battle was extremely rare. Disease or shipwreck were far more common. See Cray, "Remembering Richard Somers," 268.
[203] When a gunboat had accidentally exploded in August, killing ten American sailors (but others survived), no equivalent narratives were fashioned afterward.

this perspective, these two missions were instrumental in propagating the idea of American success in the war against Tripoli to both American and European audiences.

As winter approached, the US squadron ceased fighting. Most reports from Americans expressed optimism that the bashaw would be forced to agree to a peace treaty by spring of 1805. The new consul general Algiers, Tobias Lear, asserted that the United States had given Tripoli an "impression of our national character" which, if continued, "will readily bring the Bashaw to terms of peace without any pretensions for payment therefor, or any idea of tribute."[204] The Captain of the *Constitution*, John Rodgers, similarly stated elsewhere that the operations of the upcoming summer "will complete the Business in a manner highly honorable to the American Arms."[205] By November, Tobias Lear prepared to leave his post in Algiers in order to meet the latest commander of the American forces in the Mediterranean (Samuel Barron) and negotiate with the bashaw.[206]

**The Last Straw: James Cathcart's Departure from Barbary Affairs**

The year 1804 also marked the end of James Cathcart's involvement in Barbary affairs. After his expulsion from Tripoli, Cathcart had moved to Livorno (then referred to as Leghorn) in Italy but continued to correspond with the State Department as well as US naval commanders. As former consul, he frequently presented himself as a potential negotiator, emphasizing his knowledge of Barbary customs. Simultaneously, Cathcart insisted repeatedly that any involvement by Richard O'Brien would be detrimental to US interests. The letters Cathcart wrote between 1801 and 1804 include frequent attempts at preserving a position of influence in the Mediterranean. These attempts may be interpreted as Cathcart's final effort to salvage his personal honor by reestablishing peaceful relations between the United States and Tripoli under favorable terms.

After Tripoli declared war against the United States, James Cathcart's reputation in the Mediterranean was at a new low point. Initially, Cathcart had planned to join his colleague William Eaton in Tunis. However, the former consul was not allowed to enter the regency. According to Eaton, the bey not only said that "he would never consent that Mr. Cathcart should enter his kingdom," he also "was no Longer Considered as a Consul, having been sent away by the Bashaw of Tripoli."[207] In the eyes of Barbary rulers, it appeared that Cathcart's diplomatic

[204] Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, November 3, 1804, *Naval Documents*, V:115.
[205] John Rodgers to Secretary of the Navy, November 6, 1804, *Naval Documents*, V:124.
[206] Tobias Lear to George Davis, November 20, 1804, *Naval Documents*, V:154.
[207] William Eaton to James Madison, July 15, 1801, William Eaton Papers, Letterbook June 28, 1801 – August 23, 1802, HL.

career was considered to be over, because he had failed to prevent war with Tripoli. Even as a perceived civilian[208] with no official duties, Cathcart was considered a persona non grata of sorts.

Even among American naval commanders, Cathcart's reputation was questioned during the first year of the war. The first commander of the American squadron, Richard Dale, stated in a letter to the Navy Department that the bashaw had complained that Cathcart was "allways telling him of the Dey of Algiers" and that he and the British consul had a falling out, and that they have "not been friends for some time past."[209] While Dale was not as critical as others, his letter indicates at least some skepticism about Cathcart's diplomatic capabilities.

Interestingly, the State Department, for a time, did not share this assessment. After Richard O'Brien had requested to be replaced, Cathcart was briefly appointed the new consul to Algiers. However, the role of consul general would be discontinued, and he was to receive the same salary as the other Barbary consuls.[210] In addition, he was authorized to negotiate a new peace treaty with Tripoli. For this, he was to cooperate with Commodore Morris. His commission included a statement that the president himself trusted in his "capacity, experience and faithful regard to the interests of the United States."[211]

The reasoning behind the decision to entrust Cathcart with these responsibilities is difficult to ascertain. Cathcart's conduct as consul had been consistently unprofessional, as his correspondence to the State Department included repeated unfounded accusations against Richard O'Brien.[212] Moreover, Cathcart was the consul presiding over the outbreak of hostilities with Tripoli, but it seems as if no one in the Jefferson administration blamed Cathcart personally for the bashaw's declaration of war. The commission also demonstrates an unawareness of Barbary customs by which consuls involved in the outbreak of hostilities were considered objectionable. Overall, the most likely explanation for choosing Cathcart is that – similarly to the first time consuls were appointed to the Barbary States – he was one of only a few individuals who had direct experience with Barbary diplomacy.

Cathcart accepted the position, however, he objected to the lower salary. On this issue, Cathcart wrote a lengthy letter to the secretary of state, attempting to explain why the consul to

[208] After being exiled, Cathcart's status was somewhat ambiguous, pending further instructions from the United States.
[209] Richard Dale to Secretary of the Navy, August 18, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:553.
[210] Secretary of State to James Cathcart, April 18, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:126–128.
[211] Ibid., II:126.
[212] These continued even after the outbreak of hostilities. For example, Cathcart at one point alleged that "Mr O'Brien's administration has been a complicated chaos of deception, he has endeavour'd to keep both government & their agents in total ignorance of the real state of our affairs at Algiers" See James Cathcart to James Madison, March 4, 1802, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.

Algiers should receive more money. Perhaps, Cathcart hoped that members of the State Department (composed of new members after Jefferson ascended to the presidency) were unaware of how Barbary affairs had previously been managed, because Cathcart made numerous statements in the letter which misrepresented the position of consul general.

For example, Cathcart claimed that "the superintendency of that Consulate [Algiers] was in the first instance only nominal and by no means the reason why the salary at Algiers was greater than that of the other Regency's."[213] As has been shown previously, Richard O'Brien had not been acting as a superintendent for either Cathcart or Eaton. However, the reason for this lack of cooperation was founded in Cathcart's and Eaton's baseless accusations relating to O'Brien's alleged dealings with a Jewish banking family against US interests. The original consular instructions clearly stated that O'Brien was indeed considered the superior of the consuls in Tunis and Tripoli. In the letter, Cathcart went on to argue that the salary for the consulate in Algiers was higher for other reasons as well, but overall, the letter merely constituted an attempt to solicit more money (the same as O'Brien received) for the new position as consul.

For Cathcart, this appointment also represented an opportunity to not only redeem his reputation but also to snub his rival, Richard O'Brien. In response to Richard O'Brien facilitating the release of the crew of the *Franklin* by Tripolitan cruisers in 1802, Cathcart wrote an extremely critical letter. Cathcart presented himself as the new consul general and from this position, he emphasized that he was "the only person vested with full powers to Enter into and to conclude a Treaty with [Tripoli]."[214] Concerning the "clandestine negotiations" (the mediation by the dey to release the captives), Cathcart stated his intention to "declare it null and void."[215] In the letter, Cathcart also requested O'Brien to "Correspond with me as frequently as possible" but then "leave to retire on my arrival at Algiers."[216] Clearly, Cathcart attempted to assume a position of authority over O'Brien and, by writing a condescending letter, let O'Brien know this in no uncertain terms.

A similar tone can be found in Cathcart's correspondence with William Eaton. In one letter, he boasted that "I am the only person legally commissioned by the President of the United States to negociate with the Regency of Tripoli, that no negociation whatever can be valid

[213] James Cathcart to James Madison, November 15, 1802, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.
[214] James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, November 25, 1802, William Eaton Papers, Box 6, letters April 10, 1802 – January 26, 1803, HL.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.

before it receives my sanction and signature."[217] Moreover, Cathcart promised to only agree to a treaty if its terms were favorable to the United States. Cathcart thus quickly made it known to his fellow diplomats that he had been promoted to a position of distinction, although he struck a friendlier tone with Eaton. More broadly, these letters may then be interpreted as an attempt at reestablishing himself as an honorable person within the Mediterranean community, now that his rival was seemingly out of the way.

However, Cathcart's prospects as the new consul were soon dashed. Like the Bey of Tunis, the Dey of Algiers decided not to receive Cathcart as consul because of his prior role in presiding over the outbreak of hostilities with Tripoli. The dey even wrote a letter directly to the president in which he stated that "We have been much dissatisfied to hear That you would Think of Sending near us the Consul That you had at Tripoli, whenever he comes we will not receive him. his Character does not Suit us as we know wherever he has remained that he has created difficulties. and brought on a war."[218] Expelled from all three Barbary States, Cathcart's diplomatic career on the North African coast appeared to be over.

Both Cathcart and Eaton expressed disappointment over the dey's decision. Eaton emphasized the shame connected to surrendering to the demands of a Barbary ruler, stating "it is impossible to conjecture how long the Gov. of the U. States will yield to these piratical chiefs the prerogative of dictating terms."[219] Cathcart, on the other hand, once more accused Richard O'Brien of having secretly manipulated the Algerians. In a letter to the secretary of state, he alleged that it was "the act of the Jews & Mr. OBrion who are not desirous that any person should be appointed possessed of sufficient intelligence to investigate their iniquitous practices."[220] As was typical for the consuls, Eaton thus emphasized the idea of national humiliation, whereas for Cathcart, the dey's rejection was perceived as an attack on his personal honor.

There is no evidence that Richard O'Brien actively worked against Cathcart's appointment, despite years of repeated attacks against him, both directly and indirectly.[221] In fact, even after the dey had communicated his decision not to receive Cathcart, O'Brien wrote to Cathcart directly, reassuring him that enough bribes and presents "would induce the Govt.

[217] James Cathcart to William Eaton, November 25, 1802, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.
[218] Dey of Algiers to Thomas Jefferson, October 17, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:301.
[219] William Eaton to Robert Livingston, November 29, 1802, William Eaton Papers, Letterbook September 12, 1802 – March 22, 1803, HL
[220] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, January 25, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:348.
[221] There were numerous letters addressed to O'Brien in which he was directly accused of working against the interest of the United States. It is therefore virtually impossible that O'Brien would not have been aware of the attempts to defame his character by both James Cathcart and William Eaton.

[of Algiers] to receive as Consul or Envoy The Devil or Judas."[222] In one sense, O'Brien had expressed optimism that Cathcart might be accepted as consul after all. However, the letter might also have been intended as a veiled insult, because in O'Brien's example, Cathcart is equated to unambiguously evil and treacherous biblical characters.

In late March of 1803, William Eaton (who had by then been expelled from Tunis for his undiplomatic conduct), James Cathcart, and Richard O'Brien all met off the coast of Algiers for a last time, and "the three-cornered dispute came to a climax."[223] The meeting showed that all efforts to convince the Dey of Algiers to change his mind had been ineffectual.[224] O'Brien informed Cathcart about the "dey's positive refusal" to receive him as the new consul general.[225] After the meeting, Cathcart wrote a letter to the State Department, alleging that O'Brien never intended to resign his post but had worked to have Eaton removed from Tunis to expel all his rivals from the Barbary Coast. None of his claims were substantiated, and O'Brien had at this point made numerous requests to be relieved of his duties in Algiers. Written in hyperbolical terms typical for his correspondence, Cathcart once more alleged O'Brien to be "the echo of the Jewish Sanhedrim."[226] However, the letter also shows an awareness that any attempts at maintaining a position of influence in Barbary began to look like a lost cause, and Cathcart asked if it would be possible to receive an appointment to Spain in the letter.

Cathcart's standing continued to decline from that point onward, though he remained in the Mediterranean for a considerable time afterward. By May, he complained of having "literally nothing to do here."[227] In mid-1803, Cathcart once more attempted to take on the position of consul general. He wrote a letter to the secretary of state, asking the president to write a letter of recommendation to secure his acceptance.[228] Furthermore, he solicited O'Brien directly to change the dey's mind pointing out that "my Commission supercedes yours."[229]

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[222] Richard O'Brien to James Cathcart, February 10, 1803, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 7, NARA.
[223] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 147.
[224] Cathcart had previously even attempted to directly write to the Dey of Algiers, promising $30,000 in lieu of naval stores and wished to be received, emphasizing "that the President of the United States having deem'd it expedient to appoint [Cathcart] Consul General." See James Leander Cathcart, Consul General and Agent of the United States of America near the Regency of Algiers unto his Excellency Moustapha Bashaw & Dey of the City and Kingdom of Algiers, March 19, 1803, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.
[225] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, March 30, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:379.
[226] Ibid., II:381.
[227] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, May 5, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:398.
[228] In the letter, he once more emphasized that "Mr O'Brien's functions ought first to be suspended" prior to his arrival. James Cathcart to James Madison, June 1, 1803, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.
[229] Cathcart also pointed to the "personal malice to me" as well as "other motives diametrically opposite to the interests of the United States" as reasons why he had not been allowed to enter the regency earlier. See James Cathcart to Richard O'Brien, June 6, 1803, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.

These attempts were unsuccessful, and Cathcart remained relegated to the sidelines of Barbary affairs.

In July, Tobias Lear, a former assistant to President Washington, was appointed as new consul general. Lear was also given authority to treat with the Bashaw of Tripoli. Interestingly, Lear was once again tasked with supervising the consulates in Tunis and Tripoli, a function that had been suspended in Cathcart's commission. Moreover, Lear was paid a salary of $4,000 dollars, twice the sum that had been promised to Cathcart.[230] The commission demonstrates the trust attributed to Lear but also had another obvious consequence. As one historian bluntly put it, "Cathcart, an old Mediterranean hand, was being fired."[231]

The State Department wrote a brief letter to Cathcart, explaining that he was to be replaced. Given Cathcart's "personal unacceptableness to the Bashaw," his commission to negotiate with Tripoli was revoked. Striking a consoling tone, the letter went on to argue that "it is by no means meant that you should consider this change a disapprobation of your former conduct."[232] Since William Eaton had been expelled from Tunis, the Jefferson administration saw fit to appoint Cathcart to the consulate of Tunis, to relieve him "from the uncertainty of residence" he had experienced for the last two years.[233]

Tobias Lear's appointment in conjunction with his own relegation to the consulate in Tunis constituted a humiliation for Cathcart in two respects. Firstly, Lear became the new consul general with powers and responsibilities that had been denied to Cathcart (though not O'Brien). Cathcart was replaced despite never having been able to take on his role in Algiers. Moreover, Cathcart was not even able to receive his consolation prize, the consulate of Tunis, as he had already been denied entry to that regency as well. In September of 1803, Cathcart resigned all offices and was thus "no longer encharged with the affairs of the United States in either of those Regency's."[234] In his letter of resignation, Cathcart changed his previous request to be appointed to an office in Spain. He now asked whether he might work somewhere in the recently acquired Louisiana territory.[235] It appears that Cathcart had accepted the fact that his role as a Barbary diplomat had come to an end.

Nevertheless, Cathcart remained in the Mediterranean for another year, waiting for new instructions. During this time, he occasionally offered to buy gunboats in Italian ports for the

[230] Secretary of State to Tobias Lear, July 14, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:482–484.
[231] Ray Brighton, *The Checkered Career of Tobias Lear* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Portsmouth Marine Society, 1985), 207.
[232] Secretary of State to James Cathcart, July 16, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:487.
[233] Ibid., II:488.
[234] James Cathcart to Secretary of State, September 18, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:54.
[235] Ibid., III:55.

American naval commanders.[236] Much of his remaining correspondence was also dedicated to discouraging any involvement of Richard O'Brien in the negotiations with Tripoli. To that effect, Cathcart wrote letters to Consul General Tobias Lear,[237] Commodore Edward Preble,[238] and Secretary of State James Madison.[239] There is no evidence to suggest that Cathcart's endeavors were in any way successful. Richard O'Brien, though no longer consul, remained actively involved in negotiations with Tripoli in 1804 (after the destruction of the *Philadelphia*), and his conduct received near universal approval by diplomats and naval officers.[240]

James Cathcart, on the other hand, likely through his repeated conspiratorial allegations against Richard O'Brien, was repeatedly criticized.[241] George Davis, the chargé d'affaires in Tunis (who took over after William Eaton had been expelled) alleged that the "extravagant passions of Mr. Cathcart, his *folly,* and ill Judged communication . . . has hurried us to the brink of war."[242] Tobias Lear wrote a scathing review of Cathcart's conduct, noting "Mr [Cathcart] should consider that he is now but a private Citizen; & Further, he should remember that his conduct has given disgust (whether right or wrong) to the Barbary powers; and therefore it could do no good to our affairs for him to assume an agency in them."[243] Even William Bainbridge, while a captive in Tripoli, cautioned Edward Preble to use Cathcart in negotiations. Employing maritime metaphors, he confessed to Preble that "*In confidence* I hope that you [Preble and Cathcart] will not *sail together* for *the Port of liberty* [negotiate for the redemption of the prisoners in Tripoli] for I really believe him [Cathcart] to be a *bad Pilot*."[244] Later, Bainbridge warned Preble that "it would be highly impolitic for [Cathcart] to have any hand in

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[236] James Cathcart to Sir John Acton, March 5, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:476.
[237] "You inform'd me before we parted that you expected to make O'Brien a useful person to you at Algiers, it is impossible Sir!" See James Cathcart to Tobias Lear, November 20, 1803, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.
[238] "To see a person of Mr O'Brien's character who has for ever pursued measures diametrically opposite to mine sent on to negotiate a Treaty with a nation who has treated us with such indignity is really mortifying." See James Cathcart to Edward Preble, April 17, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:33.
[239] "I hope the intrigues of O'Brien & Davis may not prove prejudicial to our interests in those quarters, for I have always been of opinion that O'Brien was not sincere when he requested his recall." See James Cathcart to James Madison, January 6, 1804, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Tripoli, M466, Roll 2, NARA.
[240] Edward Preble commented on O'Brien that "his knowledge of the Barbarians and their language will enable him to render me essential service." See Edward Preble to Tobias Lear, February 19, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:442. Tobias Lear reassured Preble that O'Brien's "knowledge of the language, Manners and Politics of these Regencies, must be highly useful to you" and sent O'Brien in his stead to negotiate with the Bashaw of Tripoli. See Tobias Lear to Edward Preble, March 23, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:516. William Bainbridge, who had met O'Brien when he had first come to Algiers aboard the *George Washington* in 1800, even referred to O'Brien as his "friend." See William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, April 5, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:9. Likewise, the US chargé d'affaires in Tunis praised O'Brien's "long experience in the manners, habits, and Customs" of the inhabitants of the Barbary States. See George Davis to Edward Preble, April 18, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:37.
[241] Notably, Richard O'Brien – at least in his correspondence – rarely commented negatively on Cathcart's character or conduct.
[242] George Davis to Richard V. Morris, September 6, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:48.
[243] Tobias Lear to William Bainbridge, February 12, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:404.
[244] William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, February 22, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:449.

the Negotiation."[245] To Tobias Lear, Bainbridge went even further, stating "the man certainly must be deranged in his intellectuals or lost to all reflection" with regard to Cathcart's conduct.[246] It appears that virtually all persons of rank involved in Barbary relations had developed a negative view of Cathcart during the war with Tripoli.

Even President Jefferson weighed in. In response to a letter by the Bey of Tunis in which it was stated that Cathcart would not be received in the regency, Jefferson assured the Tunisian ruler that Cathcart had gone against his instructions. He further promised that "on his return to the United States, he will be made sensible how far in this he departed from the intentions of his employers. The consideration that the bands of Peace between Nations ought not to be burst asunder by the hasty and unauthorized acts of a Public Agent was worthy of your wisdom and Justice."[247] Jefferson thus demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice the reputation of a US diplomat in the eyes of a Barbary ruler. But it seems unlikely that the condemnation of Cathcart's conduct served any other purpose than preserving peaceful relations between the United States and Tunis by pretending to agree with the bey with regard to Cathcart's character. Cathcart was neither investigated nor penalized after his return to the United States.

There is one letter that would suggest that Cathcart was vaguely aware of the fact that his conduct had been questioned by the diplomats and naval officers with whom he corresponded. In April of 1804, Cathcart wrote an extensive letter to Commodore Edward Preble in which he vehemently defended himself. In his typical fashion, he accused O'Brien of having made false statements and made an appeal to Preble: "I should be extremely happy if every hour of my administration was investigated by an honest and impartial man who has no other views but the honor and interest of his Country."[248] The letter furthermore emphasized that Cathcart's conduct had been "approved by three [presidential] administrations," and he alluded to the "honorable testimonials" written by David Humphreys, Joel Barlow, and Joseph Donaldson, referring to his involvement in the peace treaty with Algiers nine years prior.[249]

Edward Preble took a measured approach to Cathcart's letter. In his reply, he defended O'Brien's character but reassured Cathcart that the former consul general was not authorized to negotiate a new treaty. That power had been delegated to Tobias Lear who, in turn, had delegated it to Preble himself. Richard O'Brien, Preble alleged, only served as an adviser on

[245] William Bainbridge to Edward Preble, March 25, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:526.
[246] William Bainbridge to Tobias Lear, April 5, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:8.
[247] Thomas Jefferson to the Bey of Tunis, January 27, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:362.
[248] The main issue revolved around claims allegedly made by O'Brien that the Tripolitans did not want Cathcart to serve as the negotiator for a new peace treaty. Cathcart promised to have letters which proved the opposite. See James Cathcart to Edward Preble, April 22, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:48
[249] James Cathcart to Edward Preble, April 22, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:49

Barbary customs. The letter also included a flattering remark on Cathcart's abilities: "It is to be regreted that any circumstance should have deprived us of *your services*."[250] Preble also promised to independently investigate Cathcart's tenure as consul once he landed in Tripoli (presumably during negotiations). In his letter, Preble thus appeared to take Cathcart's concerns seriously.

Shortly after Preble penned his response, Richard O'Brien was sent to Tripoli to offer the bashaw some $40,000 for peace and redeeming the crew of the *Philadelphia*. Clearly, O'Brien's role exceeded that of an advisor. It seems more likely that Edward Preble was careful not to antagonize Cathcart, as he could be used to procure gunboats in Italian port cities.[251] However, Preble likely preferred the expertise of more distinguished diplomats such as Richard O'Brien and Tobias Lear when it came to negotiating with the Bashaw of Tripoli. Moreover, no investigation ever took place, even after negotiations for peace began the following year.[252]

There is no evidence to suggest that Cathcart was aware of the extent to which naval officers and diplomats had commented negatively on his conduct behind his back. Many of these allegations, particularly those by William Bainbridge and Tobias Lear, would have constituted seriously challenges to Cathcart's personal honor had they become public. But since it appears that there was near universal agreement among the elites in the Mediterranean that Cathcart was untrustworthy and unreliable, there seems to have been no restraint to voice these opinions even if there was the possibility of these being read by a variety of persons: "Cathcart had revealed himself to be a slave to his own passions" and had thereby dishonored himself in the eyes of his compatriots.[253]

During James Cathcart's twenty-year involvement in Barbary affairs, one pattern emerged over and over: the claims Cathcart made about his personal honor were not respected by his peers. According to Bertram Wyatt-Brown honor may be defined as "the inner conviction of self-worth" made public in conjunction with an "assessment of the claim by the public."[254] This is precisely what Cathcart did repeatedly, but the various publics which assessed his claims – e.g. his fellow slaves in Algiers, Joel Barlow, members the State Department, and American naval officers – rarely if ever accepted these statements as valid. This, in turn, resulted in Cathcart expressing frustration over being denied his claims to honor.

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[250] Edward Preble to James Cathcart, June 1, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:141.
[251] Making such inquiries was virtually the only service Cathcart rendered to Edward Preble during the latter's stay in the Mediterranean.
[252] However, Edward Preble was at this point no longer the commander of the American squadron.
[253] Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen*, 148.
[254] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 14.

During the war with Tripoli, these expressions of frustration and even anger became most obvious in his public rivalry with Richard O'Brien who, it seemed, hardly ever struggled to have claims to his honor validated. This is evident, for instance, in his involvement in negotiations with Tripoli, even after he no longer served as consul general. O'Brien maintained a position of distinction but hardly ever even acknowledged the countless allegations made by Cathcart. Cathcart himself, through his increasingly vicious writings, contributed to his reputation as erratic and incapable of containing himself. The more it became evident that his claims to honor were denied, the more he lashed out at O'Brien, exacerbating his situation.

In this sense, Cathcart constituted an example of an individual claiming to have "acquired" personal honor through his conduct. This differed from Richard O'Brien who began his diplomatic career as a captain and enjoyed seniority over Cathcart; his honor may be described as "ascribed," i.e. more firmly presupposed a priori. While this difference may seem trivial, it does seem to confirm that Cathcart, unlike O'Brien, was more prone to having claims to his honor invalidated. In a larger sense, Cathcart's case then testifies to the rigidity of the existing social hierarchy at the time, because Cathcart was rarely treated with the distinction he perceived himself to have achieved. Thus, toward the end of 1804, Cathcart began to prepare his voyage back to the United States, largely undistinguished, having accomplished virtually nothing, and with his reputation in shambles.

**1805: Peace with Honor?**

By April of 1805, Tobias Lear received intelligence that Tripoli's demands had not changed. Lear reported that the bashaw's price for peace and ransom remained at $200,000. These terms, according to Lear, were "inadmissable, as we shall never pay a Cent for peace, and if ransom should be paid it must only be for such a number of Americans as may exceed the Number of Tripolines in our power."[255] While terms comparable to those of Sweden were still ruled out as unacceptable, Lear nevertheless considered the possibility of paying the bashaw for the redemption of the Americans which constituted yet another concession by the consul general, after the war had dragged on for nearly four years.

Simultaneously to the naval campaign against Tripoli, the State Department had also authorized William Eaton to pursue a secondary strategy: oust the reigning Bashaw of Tripoli by reinstating his older brother who had been exiled. Most likely, the idea for such an endeavor had initially been suggested by James Cathcart. As early as June 29, 1801, mere weeks after

[255] Tobias Lear to John Rodgers, May 1, 1805, *Naval Documents*, VI:1.

Tripoli's declaration of war, Cathcart wrote to Eaton that "we must establish a national character in Barbary by effecting a revolution in favor of Hamet the Bashaws Brother."[256] In the end, however, it was William Eaton who took it on himself to eventually follow through with Cathcart's plan despite slim chances of success.

William Eaton pursued the project with increasing zeal and conviction. Soon, he began to report regularly on the prospect of using Hamet as an instrument. By September of 1801, Eaton already spoke of a "project in concert between the rightful Bashaw . . . and myself to attack the usurper by land while our operations are going on by sea."[257] At this point, no such project had been authorized by the State Department.[258] In 1802, Eaton even chartered an American merchant ship (*Gloria*) on public account to find Hamet and escort the prospective bashaw to the American squadron.[259] His plan was foiled, however, when an American captain, Alexander Murray, relieved the ship of its commission, citing Eaton's lack of authorization to have the ship on public expense.[260] Eaton responded by writing a letter spanning over ten hand-written pages denouncing the actions of American naval officers (particularly Murray) since the beginning of the war. Eaton's official position as consul appeared to become increasingly unbefitting of his conduct. As one historian put it, "Eaton was basically a soldier who had been straightjacketed with a diplomatic appointment."[261]

It took roughly a year for the State Department to respond to Eaton's plan. The secretary of state wrote a letter to Eaton, reluctantly sanctioning his proposal to use Hamet against the bashaw. The official US position was outlined as follows:

> Although it does not accord with the general sentiment or views of the United States, to intermeddle in the domestic contests of other countries, it cannot be unfair in the prosecution of a just war, or the accomplishment of a reasonable peace, to turn to their advantage, the enmity and pretensions of others against a common foe. How far success in the plan ought to be relied on, cannot be decided at this distance.[262]

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[256] James Cathcart to William Eaton, June 29, 1801, *Naval Documents*, I:494.
[257] William Eaton to James Madison, September 5, 1801, William Eaton Papers, Letterbook June 28, 1801 – August 23, 1802, HL.
[258] Even as late as April of 1802, Cathcart vaguely pointed toward the idea that "The President in his speech recommends coercive measures against Tripoli" as a justification for the project. See James Cathcart to William Eaton, April 10, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:112.
[259] William Eaton to Joseph Bounds, March 24, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:95.
[260] Alexander Murray to William Eaton, May 6, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:145. Murray also justified his decision to the secretary of the navy, stating "how far this step may meet the approbation of the executive I know not, but my judgment leads me to think that he was unauthorized in entering into such deeds, & extravagances, which coud have no good tendency." See Alexander Murray to Secretary of the Navy, May 7, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:146.
[261] Rejeb, "The Impact of Barbary on Early American Nationalism," 78–79.
[262] James Madison to William Eaton, August 22, 1802, William Eaton Papers, Box 6, letters April 10, 1802 – January 26, 1803, HL.

The phrasing clearly points to an awareness that the strategy to effectively stage a coup d'état in a foreign country constituted highly extraordinary behavior, even if the opponent was thought of as generally inferior or acting outside accepted norms.

Despite the State Department's comments, the prospect to use Hamet remained on uncertain footing in the ensuing months. In January of 1803, the "lawful Bashaw" wrote a letter directly to Thomas Jefferson, reassuring the president that the plan might yet be enacted if he could receive money and supplies.[263] But by November, Hamet was rumored to have fled to Alexandria, Egypt out of fear of retaliation by his brother. Whereas Commodore Morris had been mostly silent on the project, it was renewed under his successor. Edward Preble voiced his support for the idea, particularly after the capture of the *Philadelphia*.[264] In the end, however, it was William Eaton who convinced the Jefferson administration to commit to his plan.

After he was expelled from the regency of Tunis for his uncourtly manners, Eaton briefly returned to the United States. During his stay in America, Eaton was able to gain permission by Jefferson and his cabinet to actively pursue the mission. For this purpose, he was given some supplies and the vague title of "Navy Agent for the Barbary Regencies."[265] Eaton returned to the Barbary Coast in September of 1804 and soon thereafter traveled to Egypt in order to track down Hamet, recruit ground forces, and prepare for a land assault on Tripoli.[266] Eaton arrived in Alexandria on November 25, 1804. It took months for Eaton to discover Hamet's whereabouts, and the two finally met on February 5, 1805. On March 4, William Eaton sent to the secretary of state the draft for a treaty between Hamet and the United States, titled "Convention between the United States of America and his Highness, Hamet Caramanly, Bashaw of Tripoli." The document included articles that would be expected in a new treaty with Tripoli: namely, peace between the two countries and no provisions for ransom and tribute.

Interestingly, the would-be bashaw promised to reimburse the United States for the expenses of Hamet's mission to retake the throne of Tripoli. According to article 5 of the treaty, the United States would receive the complete tribute payments made to Tripoli by Denmark, Sweden, and the Batavian Republic[267] until all incurring debts were repaid.[268] This provision thus constituted a rather unambiguous departure from previous ambitions to end the system of tribute and ransom altogether. Instead, the United States now stood to benefit from tribute

[263] Hamet, Lawful Bashaw of Tripoli to Thomas Jefferson, January 20, 1803, *Naval Documents*, II:347.
[264] Edward Preble to Secretary of the Navy, January 17, 1804, *Naval Documents*, III:339.
[265] Secretary of the Navy to William Eaton, May 30, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:120.
[266] For a detailed account of Eaton's interactions with the Jefferson administration, see the Zacks, *The Pirate Coast*, 31–44, 85–102.
[267] Between 1775 and 1806, this was an independent republic until it was incorporated to the Throne of Holland.
[268] William Eaton to Secretary of State, March 4, 1805, *Naval Documents*, V:367.

payments made by European nations, including those of a former ally, Sweden.[269] (Of course, Eaton was hardly authorized to negotiate a treaty with a prospective foreign government, and any treaty would have to be ratified by the Senate.)

Eaton took it upon himself to lead the mission. Article 8 of the treaty firmly established Eaton's rank as "General, and Commander in Chief of the land forces."[270] As such, Eaton would command all of Hamet's troops. (This was likely a nod to George Washington who Eaton had venerated in his letters.) Initially, Eaton had requested one hundred marines to "place the success of the mission beyond the caprice of incident."[271] In the end, however, he was denied this request and was ultimately accompanied by around half a dozen US soldiers. The mission's ground forces were mostly Arab and some European mercenaries. By the end of March, Eaton recorded in his journal that he commanded approximately seven hundred "fighting men," many of whom had brought their families as well. When Eaton crossed the desert from Alexandria on his way to the Tripolitan city of Derne, his entourage comprised twelve hundred persons.[272]

On April 27, Eaton and his forces, in a coordinated attack with US warships, conquered the city of Derne. For the first time, the American flag was raised in the context of foreign conquest overseas. Overall, the attack proved relatively successful for Eaton, as only one soldier was killed and thirteen were wounded.[273] While it might have seemed as if the mission to oust the reigning bashaw was going well, Eaton and Hamet were hardly in a position to advance further after taking the city. Instead, Eaton and his troops found themselves on the defensive and had to fend off attempts to retake the city in the days following their victory.[274] The chances of reinstating Hamet as the rightful bashaw remained slim.

News about Eaton's conquest soon reached Tripoli, and Tobias Lear seized the opportunity to reenter negotiations for peace. Whereas Tripoli's terms for peace had previously been as high as $200,000, the display of US capabilities to threaten the bashaw's claim to the throne appears to have made an impression on the Tripolitan ruler who was now willing to make concessions. (An American captive in Tripoli wrote that the bashaw had known for some time that Hamet was used by the US to supplant him.[275]) In the end, Lear favored pragmatism

[269] Ironically, Eaton later speculated on the ramifications of his mission's success and wrote that it would be "a death blow to the Barbary System." See William Eaton to Samuel Barron, April 29, 1805, *Naval Documents*, V:552.
[270] William Eaton to Secretary of State, March 4, 1805, *Naval Documents*, V:368.
[271] William Eaton to Samuel Barron, February 14, 1805, *Naval Documents*, V:353.
[272] Extract from journal of William Eaton, April 2, 1805, *Naval Documents*, V:478.
[273] Isaac Hull to Samuel Barron, April 28, 1805, *Naval Documents*, V:548.
[274] See William Eaton to Samuel Barron, May 15, 1805, *Naval Documents*, VI:14 and Isaac Hull to Samuel Barron, May 17, 1805, *Naval Documents*, VI:20.
[275] Jonathan Cowdery wrote in his journal that the bashaw contemplated executing all American prisoners if he would be further threatened. See Cowdery, "American Captives in Tripoli," 167. Moreover, Edward Preble once

over bravado, and an agreement was reached: there would be neither tribute nor ransom, all prisoners of war would be exchanged "man for man," the remaining Americans were ransomed for a total of $60,000, and Hamet's family (heretofore held hostage in Tripoli) would be released. The consul noted that on June 4, "the flag staff was raised on the American House, and the Flag of the U. States display'd."[276] Peace was restored.

In comparison to initial assertations regarding the conditions for peace, these terms constituted a compromise at best. Numerous Americans, naval officers, and diplomats alike had previously stated that no payments should be made to Tripoli for the peace to qualify as "honorable." Moreover, it took extraordinary measures to reach the agreement. The naval campaign against Tripoli had largely been ineffective. Instead, it was necessary to conquer an enemy city for the bashaw to agree to negotiate. A strategy which the secretary of state described as highly irregular. The hopes expressed by numerous Americans at the outset of the war – that Tripoli would be easily defeated – were neither reflected in the way the war had progressed (and dragged on) nor in the terms of the peace treaty.

Tobias Lear nevertheless presented the restoration of peace in a positive light. He commented that the terms of peace were "highly honorable and advantageous to our Country."[277] Elsewhere, Lear also prided himself on the fact that it was the "first instance where a peace has been concluded by any of the Barbary States on board a ship of war."[278] Additionally, the consul general took into consideration what the peace meant in a broader context, stating "Our peace will be so unusually honorable, that we must not expect it will be fully relished by all the Representatives of the European Nations here."[279] Like many Americans previously, Lear measured the success of the treaty by comparing the US to European countries.

In his report to the secretary of the navy, the acting commander of the American squadron, John Rodgers,[280] summarized the conclusion of the treaty as follows:

> [The bashaw] acknowledged that he felt sensible our efforts would be sufficient to reduce his Town and oblige him to retire to the Mountains – This acknowledgment at once precluded the possibility of acquiring any honor by our

even encouraged the French chargé d'affaires to tell the bashaw of Eaton's mission. See Edward Preble to French Chargé d'Affaires, August 11, 1804, *Naval Documents*, IV:398.

[276] Tobias Lear to James Madison, July 5, 1805, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 8, NARA.

[277] Tobias Lear to Samuel Barron, June 6, 1805, *Naval Documents*, VI:94.

[278] The negotiations were carried out by emissaries of the bashaw. This meant that all the typical ceremonies deemed humiliating (for example, kissing a ruler's hand) were avoided. Additionally, the fact that Tripolitans were coming aboard American ships to negotiate likely was likely perceived as a projection of strength. Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, July 5, 1805, *Naval Documents*, VI:162.

[279] Tobias Lear to John Rodgers, June 4, 1804, *Naval Documents*, VI:82.

[280] Samuel Barron, the nominal commander of the American squadron, had fallen ill and was mostly unable to fulfill his duties as commodore. Rodgers acted in his stead.

> Arms, but indeed the reverse, as it would have been persecuting an Enemy who in anticipation of our Vengeance in this Summers Expedition by his own acknowledgements felt himself more than half vanquished.[281]

The sentiment expressed by Rodgers was hence extremely charitable in this assessment of the war's resolution as well as American capabilities to further inflict damage to the city of Tripoli.

Notably, the failed attempts of effectively bombarding the town and fortifications of the previous summer were ignored in this statement.[282] Instead, Rodgers argued that the bashaw did no longer have the means to defend himself. Thus, according to Rodgers, the victory over Tripoli would have been overwhelmingly one-sided, implying that fairness in battle was a necessary prerequisite for an honorable victory. Rodgers' reasoning constitutes a rather interesting attempt at rationalizing why it was therefore desirable to instead agree to the peace treaty while simultaneously presenting the decision as generous, even benevolent, on the part of the United States.

A surgeon's mate by the name of John Butler had an entirely different perspective about the terms of the treaty. On the ransom payment of $60,000, the sailor commented the following: "whether it was necessary and consistent with the honour of the American Nation, at that time, to give that sum, will be a matter of dispute hereafter." With regard to the fleet's ability to bombard the city, he wrote "we could not have injured the walls of Tripoli materially –being extremely high and from fifty to sixty or seventy feet thick."[283] Without the obligation of having to justify the war's outcome to a superior, the sailor's comments provide some insight into how a lower-ranking sailor described the terms for peace. In this instance, these descriptions were essentially the opposite of John Rodger's lofty assessment.

Unsurprisingly, William Eaton expressed his disapproval of the peace treaty. Throughout his mission, Eaton had insisted that the objective of reinstating Hamet was to "effect a cheap honorable, and permanent peace to our country,"[284] as well as "the liberation of three hundred Americans from the Chains of Barbarism."[285] The treaty (or "convention") with Hamet would arguably produce a more reliable peace when compared to the one which was negotiated with the reigning bashaw. And while his position in Derne was hardly secure, with reinforcements, Eaton argued, the march on Tripoli might yet be attempted. The peace treaty, especially with the provision for ransom, was thus characterized as premature by Eaton.[286]

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[281] John Rodgers to Secretary of the Navy, June 8, 1805, *Naval Documents*, VI:98.
[282] As noted previously, the bombardment of Tripoli had no effect on the demands issued by the bashaw.
[283] John Butler to Stephen Pynchon, July 3, 1805, *Naval Documents*, VI:152.
[284] William Eaton to Samuel Smith, August 19, 1802, *Naval Documents*, II:277.
[285] Extract from journal of William Eaton, March 20, 1805, *Naval Documents*, V:433.
[286] Eaton argued that "If the 60.000 dollars had, in stead of going to Joseph, been sent to Hamet Bashaw at the moment of the *Argus* rejoining us at Bomba on the 15th of April, and correspondent vigorous operations pursued

Additionally, Eaton emphasized that the United States had effectively promised Hamet to follow through with the mission and insisted that this promise should be kept. "I cannot, from any shape in which the subject can be viewed be persuaded that the manner of serving ourselves of Hamet Bashaw, and abandoning him, can be reconciled to those principles of honor and justice which I know, actuate the national breast," Eaton wrote.[287] Lear's compromise was therefore considered not only strategically inexpedient, it also betrayed previous assurances that had been made to Hamet.[288]

In the end, however, the prevalent attitude was to dismiss any concerns over broken promises, especially, when these were made to individuals originating from the Barbary States. Most consequentially, this view was espoused by Tobias Lear who had long expressed skepticism about Hamet's abilities to dethrone the bashaw.[289] But as Lear arrived in the Mediterranean only after the mission was underway, he had no means of stopping Eaton. Yet, when the opportunity to call off the mission and make peace presented itself, Lear seized it. Perhaps as a gesture of good will, Lear also made the release of Hamet's family a sticking point in the negotiations despite no pressure to do so.[290]

Back in the United States, the war's unexpectedly prompt conclusion received praise as well as condemnation. Federalist publications reprimanded Lear for agreeing to the ransom payment. Democratic-Republican newspapers took the opposite position, praising Lear and downplaying the costs. The release of the crew of the *Philadelphia* was one of the few causes for celebration upon which both sides would agree. Additionally, William Eaton was celebrated as a war hero, receiving accolades comparable to Stephen Decatur. Other than that, the press interpreted the terms of peace largely along partisan lines.[291]

When Thomas Jefferson addressed Congress for the fifth time, he also emphasized the positive aspects of the war's conclusion. He praised the liberation of all American prisoners of war and singled out Eaton's mission which he described as follows: "An operation by land by

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elsewhere, we should have started the usurper from his Capital before this date and *wrested* our captives from his chains" See William Eaton to Thomas Dwight, June 17, 1805, *Naval Documents,* VI:122.

[287] William Eaton to Samuel Barron, June 11, 1805, *Naval Documents,* VI:59.

[288] Eaton ended one of his letters insisting that "*To abandon him here is not to cooperate with him, but with his rival!*" William Eaton to Samuel Barron, June 11, 1805, *Naval Documents,* VI:63.

[289] As early as November of 1804, Lear wrote that "I presume the co-operation of the Brother of the Bashaw of Tripoli will not be attempted . . . He is now in Egypt driven by his brother from Darne, where it is presumed he might have made a stand, had he been a man of any force or influence; which from the best accounts I can collect he is not." See Tobias Lear to Secretary of State, November 3, 1804, *Naval Documents,* V:116.

[290] Lear noted in his journal that there was some back and forth with regard to this issue, and that he even reported to have threatened to end the negotiations if the bashaw would not comply and release Hamet's family. See Tobias Lear to James Madison, July 5, 1805, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Algiers, M23, Roll 8, NARA.

[291] For a detailed discussion on the public reactions to the peace treaty and Eaton's mission, see Zeledon, "The United States and the Barbary Pirates," 231–244.

a small band of our countrymen and others . . . gallantly conducted by our late consul Eaton . . . contributed doubtless to the impression which produced peace."[292] In this, Jefferson greatly exaggerated the role of the six American soldiers, relegating nearly 700 mercenaries to being "others," despite the fact that, as one historian has since observed, "US victory depended almost entirely on the labor of North African Muslims."[293] In doing so, an important aspect of the mission to seize Derne was omitted to construe a more favorable narrative.[294] Additionally, Jefferson avoided any mention of the $60,000 ransom payment.

Overall, the war's conclusion constituted a complete departure from virtually all objectives that had been espoused previously. For one, the war effort had cost approximately $3.5 million by 1805, far exceeding expectations.[295] From a strictly fiscal standpoint, the war had been far more expensive than any diplomatic alternative. Even if a concession to Tripoli at the outset of the war would have resulted in new demands by Algiers and Tunis, it seems highly unlikely that these would have exceeded the sum spent on the war. In terms of expenditure, the four-year conflict could hardly be argued to constitute a success.

Furthermore, the renewed demands by Algiers and Tunis, as well as the ransom payment by the United States to free the crew of the *Philadelphia*, indicate that the American naval presence in the Mediterranean did not intimidate the rulers of the Barbary States. The naval campaigns hardly changed this. The blockade of Tripoli was porous, and the bombing of Tripoli proved largely ineffective. The most celebrated events of the war were the destruction of an American frigate – by Americans – and the (likely unintentional) explosion of the *Intrepid*. (The latter event, according to Jonathan Cowdery, was likewise celebrated by Tripoli.) There is virtually no evidence to suggest that the show of force had any meaningful effect on how Americans were viewed by Barbary rulers.

Moreover, the bashaw remained in power, and the Barbary system of tribute and ransom remained in place. The ransom payment by the United States, despite constituting a compromise, was still a far cry from dictating US terms to Tripoli. Some scholars have claimed that US objectives in the Mediterranean had been achieved with the war's conclusion.[296] But

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[292] Thomas Jefferson, "Fifth Annual Message to Congress, December 3, 1805," *The Avalon Project*, Yale Law School, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/jeffmes5.asp. Accessed February 17, 2021.
[293] Eric Covey, *Americans at War in the Ottoman Empire: US Mercenary Force in the Middle East* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 13.
[294] As Covey has further argued: "In nearly every historiographic account produced for more than 200 years, these mercenaries have been set in deep contrast to William Eaton – 'America's Lawrence' – who organized and helped to lead the assault on Derne." See Covey, *Americans at War in the Ottoman Empire*, 13.
[295] Kitzen, *Tripoli and the United States at War*, 179.
[296] According to one scholar, "the president's objectives for his country were the right of free trade and safe passage on the sea and the return of the American prisoners." See Carson, "Jefferson, Congress, and the Question of Leadership in the Tripolitan War," 420.

initial ambitions of ending Barbary piracy altogether were quickly abandoned and the diplomats' conditions for the war's conclusion became increasingly malleable. In the end, "in many respects the conflict had a muddled effect, falling far short of the lofty aims of Barbary reform suggested by Jefferson and his peers."[297]

Lastly, there is virtually no reason to assume that the war against Tripoli had advanced the reputation of the United States internationally. According to one historian, the war's conclusion "hardly caused a ripple in Europe."[298] This seems unsurprising for numerous reasons. For one, Europeans had also occasionally made war against the Barbary States in the past centuries. While the United States had employed some novel strategies (most notably the use of gunboats and Eaton's attempted coup), the end result could hardly be described as extraordinary or even noteworthy. After all, ransom for the release of the American prisoners of war was still paid.

More importantly, the situation in Europe was likely regarded as far more consequential at the time. By 1803, the Napoleonic Wars took center stage, as "American as well as European newspapers regarded the struggle between Europe's titans as the top story of the day, relegating America's clash with Tripoli to a sidebar."[299] Indeed, the conflicts that would last for over a decade appeared to decide grand matters such as the future of monarchies, the efficacy of democratic revolutions, and the balance of power in Europe more generally.[300] From this perspective, the "victory" against the ostensibly weakest of the Barbary States under more or less typical conditions could hardly stand out.

[297] Glenn James Voelz, "Images of Enemy and Self in the Age of Jefferson: The Barbary Conflict in Popular Literary Depiction," *War and Society* 28 (2009): 46.
[298] Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*, 160.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Ibid.

## Conclusion

In many ways, the years between 1785 and 1805 constituted a formative time period for the United States. When the first US sailors fell prey to Algerian corsairs, American statesmen were altogether unprepared to engage with the remote North African regencies diplomatically (with the possible exception of Morocco). In contrast to European nations, the new republic had had almost no prior experience with the Barbary States. This notwithstanding, the suspension of Mediterranean trade was deemed out of the question. And even if this had been the official policy of the United States, its enforcement would have been virtually impossible.

Instead, US diplomats and politicians started out with high ambitions for the future of their country. The prospect of going to war became a popular talking point among the American political elite. In this context, the rhetoric of national honor was frequently invoked as a justification for hostilities in the correspondence of early American statesmen. Federalists also favored this idea as an opportunity to advance domestic political goals. And yet, the proposal to intervene militarily transcended early American partisan divisions. Heavily influenced by Enlightenment philosophy, Thomas Jefferson stands out as one of the most ardent proponents of warfare against the Barbary States. From the very inception of US foreign policy to his resignation as secretary of state in 1793, Jefferson remained consistent on this point, although the proposed ways to achieve this end varied over time. While his militant stance on this issue was also unquestionably informed by desires to protect American trade interests, much of his rhetoric and most of his arguments were informed by the desire to establish, protect, and maintain the idea of US national honor. These sentiments were most pronounced in the private correspondence with his friend and colleague, John Adams, who agreed in principle but questioned the practicality of a naval buildup. By 1790, Jefferson also made his arguments public in his communications to Congress.

However, despite legislative authorization to build warships after the second round of captures in 1793, the United States ultimately opted for a diplomatic solution. After an expensive peace treaty had been negotiated, Joel Barlow is widely credited with saving this treaty by promising the Dey of Algiers an American-built frigate, among other concessions. The policies that were implemented thus directly contradicted the expressed desires of most American foreign policy makers at the time. In the end, submission to the Barbary States was perceived as a humiliating and shameful experience for those involved. However, in light of international turmoil resulting from the French Revolution, this failure on behalf of the

American government received comparatively little attention by American newspapers at the time.

But the significance of Barbary corsairing was not only contemplated by quasi-aristocratic statesmen in the United States. The American captives in Algiers also commented on the subject, and the sailor James Cathcart even provided detailed accounts of his captivity. Initially, Cathcart expressed optimism that he would soon be redeemed. But these hopes were soon disappointed, and his prolonged captivity was characterized by expressions of extreme shame and humiliation. Next, Cathcart described how he was ultimately able to overcome these stigmas by rising to a position of power. Throughout, situations in which Cathcart enjoyed any degree agency were emphasized, whereas occasions in which he is acted upon were rarely mentioned. Beginning as little more than a common sailor, Cathcart outlined how he was able to become a wealthy and influential figure in Algiers. His claims implied that he was the social equal of first the captains and later American diplomats, with whom he corresponded and cooperated during the negotiations for the redemption of the American captives. Most importantly, he took credit for the Algerian-American treaty above all others involved. Joseph Donaldson was described as incompetent and O'Brien as deceitful. Joel Barlow was dismissed as having arrived after the treaty had already been negotiated. However, as Cathcart's extant writings are one of the very few sources which contain descriptions of the negotiations between the Americans and the Dey of Algiers, there is no way to verify many of these details.

There is, however, reason to suspect that Cathcart greatly exaggerated his role when comparing his version of events to that of John Foss, another American who was captured during the second wave of raids on American shipping in 1793. Foss's account of his three-year captivity does not provide a very detailed description of the negotiations. However, Foss described Barlow as a "worthy gentleman, whose compassionate services for his distressed countrymen, can never be estimated too highly."[1] Donaldson was mentioned only briefly, and Cathcart was not mentioned at all. Of course, this may be due to Foss's limited access to the higher ranks of Algerian slave society because of his status as a common sailor. Nevertheless, Cathcart insisted repeatedly to have helped his fellow countrymen in various ways, so the omission from this account nevertheless stands out in this context.

Foss's journal is but one example of Joel Barlow (as well as Donaldson and Humphreys) receiving the credit for the treaty with Algiers. For Cathcart, the restoration of his personal

[1] John Foss, "A Journal of the Captivity and Sufferings of John Foss; several years a prisoner in Algiers: Together with some account of the treatment of Christian slaves when sick:—and observations on the manners and customs of the Algerines" in *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, ed. Paul Baepler (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 98–99.

honor became a central theme throughout his writings: "Far from a transparent and faithful narrative, Cathcart's writing draws attention to diplomatic prose as productively ambiguous, as consciously concerned with issues of representation, interpretation, close-reading and translation."[2] In light of this context, it also seems more than likely Cathcart wrote his accounts with publication in mind.

Other authors who wrote about their captivity occasionally invoked the language of sensibility (Isaac Stephens), dryly presented themselves as experts in matters of foreign policy (Richard O'Brien), or wrote for the entertainment of wider audiences (John Foss).[3] From these modes of writing, Cathcart's account differs substantially. Combining all these elements, his writings by and large constitute a testament to the idea that even common sailors contemplated the consequences of American citizens being enslaved in the context of both personal and national honor. Cathcart took pride in his accomplishments and wished to be recognized as defying captivity and overcoming adversity in a hostile and foreign environment. Particularly Cathcart's description of negotiations with the Dey of Algiers appear to be an attempt at having his allegedly honorable conduct recognized by his peers or even a wider audience.

While Cathcart routinely emphasized that he did not receive sufficient recognition for his diplomatic services, he was nevertheless one of the three consuls appointed to the Barbary States. Given the underdeveloped state of the US consular service, this may have been a product of necessity, or it may have been an expression of trust in Cathcart's capabilities due to his experience with matters relating to Algiers. Whatever may have been the case, peculiar circumstances surrounding the negotiation of the peace treaty with Algiers as well as the subsequent appointment of Richard O'Brien to the position of consul general laid the groundwork for future conflicts among the consuls. These escalated with O'Brien engaging in a relationship with Cathcart's former maid. Afterward, the consular correspondence chronicles the unfolding of an extremely adversarial relationship between Cathcart and O'Brien.

The most intriguing aspect to this prolonged rivalry is *how* Cathcart presented his grievances. Again and again, Cathcart alluded to the publicity of his repeated humiliations, and he frequently referred to specific pieces of evidence that would bolster his increasingly conspiratorial allegations, or he identified potential witnesses that might vouch for him. From the early beginnings to the very end of his career, Cathcart framed his adversarial relationship with Richard O'Brien as a contest for personal honor. The desire for public recognition for past

[2] Martha Elena Rojas, "'Insults Unpunished': Barbary Captives, American Slaves, and the Negotiation of Liberty," *Early American Studies* 2 (2003), 163.
[3] Unlike Cathcart's writing, Foss' narrative was published in 1798.

and present accomplishments remained a persistent feature in Cathcart's correspondence. Both during their captivity and their consular service, Cathcart routinely emphasized that he was denied this recognition, whereas O'Brien, it seems, was capable of distinguishing himself among a respectable group of foreign policy makers who praised his diplomatic skills.

During his tenure as consul general, O'Brien rarely if ever had to reinforce his social rank as vehemently as Cathcart did. Instead, his correspondence was predominantly written in far less emotionally charged language. He commented on initial problems of the US merchant marine and occasionally recommended solutions. When the opportunity presented itself, O'Brien was not above boasting about his competence, as is evident in the report of him overvaluing a ship and then presenting it as a present to the dey, thereby cleverly evading future demands for tribute. Unlike Cathcart, however, O'Brien was far more subtle in suggesting his own prowess, and he did so only on rare occasions, indicating that his rank as an honorable gentleman was recognized by his peers.

In Tunis, William Eaton provided an altogether different perspective. Given his status as a former career soldier and his lack of experience in Barbary diplomacy, it comes as little surprise that Eaton predominantly emphasized the violation of *national* honor in his correspondence. Consular presents, tribute, ransom, and the enslavement of Europeans were described as shameful aspects to the system of Barbary corsairing. For these humiliations, Eaton demanded swift retribution. Eaton (among others) identified the United Kingdom and France as the only respectable nations in the Mediterranean. Implicitly, Eaton acknowledged that the United States were not regarded as being on the same footing as these nations which in turn suggested they were more comparable to smaller, weaker European countries. To remedy this state of affairs, Eaton (alongside his colleagues) advised the State Department to dispatch an American fleet to the Mediterranean.

By 1800, the Adams administration complied by sending the *George Washington* to Algiers. Ironically, what was ostensibly intended to be a demonstration of strength, ultimately culminated in one of the most humiliating diplomatic episodes of the young country's history. When they Dey of Algiers requested to have the *George Washington* sail under Algerian colors to Constantinople, US naval officers were compelled to acquiesce or risk war as well as their own enslavement. American diplomats universally lamented this infraction on US national honor. In addition, American newspapers once again shifted their focus on Barbary affairs and condemned the supposed submission of Captain Bainbridge and Richard O'Brien. After the election of 1800, Thomas Jefferson was in a prime position to engage with the Barbary States with a greater degree of force. Up until this point, the reports from the American consuls on the

Barbary Coast frequently suggested that US national honor was suffering in the Mediterranean but also that this might easily be remedied with the display of the (allegedly) powerful American navy.

By the time preparations were made for an expedition to the Mediterranean (that stood on shaky legal grounds), the Bashaw of Tripoli had already decided that US negligence warranted a declaration of war. For the most part, this escalation in foreign relations can be attributed to the disregard on the side of the Adams administration which did little to address the grievances expressed by the bashaw despite numerous warnings. Jefferson, now president, would have his war. While it was ultimately the bashaw who initiated the conflict, the decision to unilaterally send the navy into the Mediterranean followed roughly fifteen years of repeated calls for a more aggressive foreign policy by Jefferson himself as well as diplomats stationed in the Mediterranean. The calls for action were routinely justified on the basis of protecting national honor and establishing the United States as a respectable nation overseas.

Many Americans initially expressed optimism that the conflict would not last long. Diplomats and naval officers alike once again described the contest between the two countries as a quest for honor in front of an international audience. After all, war carried with it a sense of publicity that diplomacy simply did not. However, the hopes for quick and decisive victory were soon disappointed. Despite one initial triumph at sea, the war dragged on for years. In addition to disrespectful treatment of the US Navy by European countries and increasing demands by other Barbary rulers, the prolonged conflict exposed a possibility that had not been considered previously – the prospect of international humiliation inherent in America's inability to defeat Tripoli.

When Tripolitans captured the *USS Philadelphia*, these anxieties became a reality for many Americans in the Mediterranean. Tripoli was now seemingly winning the war and gained a significant strategic advantage. The idea of an honorable peace seemed out of reach, now that 307 Americans were held captive in Tripoli. Moreover, the decision to surrender the ship caused Americans to speculate over the supposed honor inherent in choosing death over slavery, a theme repeatedly invoked by various commentators at the time. Such a decision, it was argued, would not only have been a testimony to the bravery of American sailors but would also have reflected the national honor of the United States as a nation that would not be defeated by the allegedly inferior "barbarian" North Africans.

Stephen Decatur's successful mission to burn the *Philadelphia* may then be interpreted as an attempt to compensate for previous humiliations. While the mission constituted little more than Americans destroying their own frigate (while the crew remained imprisoned), Decatur

was nevertheless celebrated as a war hero. Despite evidence which suggests that Americans had executed Tripolitan prisoners, the tale of an overwhelmingly successful mission was shared and published throughout the Mediterranean. The inquiries by Tripolitans into the treatment of Tripolitan prisoners of war constituted a threat to this narrative and were either evaded or rebuked by American naval officers.

The subsequent bombardment of Tripoli was likewise hailed by American sailors as an innovative strategy to fight Tripoli, while many within the city dismissed these campaigns as ineffective. More notably, the likely unintentional explosion of the *Intrepid* was celebrated as a demonstration of honorable Americans choosing death over slavery (especially after Bainbridge and his crew had failed to do so). Again, little evidence supports this view, as Tripolitans *also* celebrated the event, and no credible commentators reported any casualties on the Tripolitan side. Since there were no survivors to dispute or verify any claims surrounding the event, Americans once more opted to interpret the event as yet another incident that advanced conceptions of national honor.

In the end, peace with Tripoli was possible only due to the extraordinary efforts of William Eaton and his (failed) mission to overthrow the Bashaw of Tripoli. Eaton's justification for this extreme measure was to have peace on honorable terms and prevent any future humiliations of tribute and ransom. Ironically, the mission's expenses, if successful, would have been paid with the tribute of European countries, including a former ally, Sweden. However, Tobias Lear's successful negotiations with the bashaw put an end to Eaton's scheme. While Lear and his superior, John Rodgers, both presented the peace as conducive to the honor of the United States, the terms clearly stood in opposition to the conditions that had previously been outlined to constitute an "honorable peace." Tripoli had hardly been vanquished, and the war had dragged on for years, costing millions. Most importantly, Americans still had to pay for the release of the crew of the *Philadelphia*.

Against the backdrop of the general turmoil that was caused by the Napoleonic Wars, the Barbary War's resolution received comparatively little attention. And yet, the war with Tripoli (as well as all diplomatic efforts preceding the conflict) clearly show that the pursuit of national honor was a major motivation in foreign policy during the early modern period. Frequently described as an end in itself, American diplomats and statesmen were perpetually driven by the pursuit of honor on the world stage. There is no doubt that the protection of American commerce in the Mediterranean constituted an undercurrent of the foreign policy pursued by the United States (especially under the Jefferson presidency). However, an evaluation of the correspondence of those involved in Mediterranean affairs has shown that

economic rationales were rarely invoked as a justification for the belligerent actions that were undertaken by the United States in attempts to force the Barbary States into lowering or even suspending their demands for annual tribute or ransom. The uniquely aggressive rhetoric inherent in these justifications almost exclusively invoked the language of honor and its related concepts. As this study hopes to have shown, to understand American foreign relations at the time of the early republic is to appreciate the importance of honor for early American foreign policy makers.

**Epilogue and a Note on the War of 1812**

Coinciding with the conclusion of the Tripolitan War, a new cohort of diplomats were established on the Barbary Coast. None of the original three consuls would return to their posts. After James Cathcart had come back to America, he wrote directly to President Jefferson and humbly solicited a new appointment. The extensive letter once more recapitulated the highlights of Cathcart's career. Cathcart mentioned his decade of captivity in Algiers, his role in negotiating the peace treaty in 1795, the letters of reference by Joel Barlow and Joseph Donaldson, as well as the duplicitous conduct of Richard O'Brien.[4] However, unlike much of his previous correspondence, the letter lacked a self-congratulatory tone. Instead, it seems that Cathcart attempted to obtain a new job primarily through Jefferson's empathy.

In 1806, the State Department responded by once again requesting Cathcart's expertise in matters related to the Barbary Coast. The former consul was given the responsibility of supervising a diplomatic delegation from Tunis. An emissary named Sidi Soliman Mellimelli came to the United States with instructions to resolve a dispute that had occurred during the Tripolitan War. Then, American warships had seized Tunisian vessels that were attempting to breach the American naval blockade. Now, the Bey of Tunis had sent Mellimelli to demand restitution. It was Cathcart's responsibility to take care of Mellimelli's requests for presents and luxuries, as he toured the country. In the end, Mellimelli set sail for Tunis after staying for several months, but his visit had failed to resolve any outstanding disputes between the two countries.[5]

Once the business with Tunis was finished, Cathcart was appointed to the consulate of Madeira, an island which is part of the Portuguese archipelago and situated in the Atlantic near Morocco. Cathcart's consulship in Tripoli had produced countless pages of letters filled with

[4] James Cathcart to Thomas Jefferson, August 12, 1805, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Funchal, Madeira, T205, Roll 1, National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland. Hereafter referred to as NARA.
[5] For a detailed account of this diplomatic episode, see Julia H. Macleod and Louis B. Wright, "Mellimelli: A Problem for President Jefferson in North African Diplomacy" *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 20 (1944).

detailed military intelligence, extensive commentary on minute issues, and frenzied accusations. But now Cathcart's behavior seemed far more restrained, as he sent just over twenty letters to the State Department throughout the decade-long tenure at Madeira (and briefly Cadiz). In this, Cathcart's conduct may be regarded as more in line with the behavior of most US consuls throughout the world at the time.[6]

Cathcart returned to the United States in 1816. Toward the end of his career, Cathcart served as a land surveyor in the Louisiana territories and ultimately settled for a position in the Treasury Department until his death in 1843. Historians who have traced Cathcart's life beyond his service on the Barbary Coast generally concur that his career had stagnated after 1805. One even alleged that "Cathcart's best years . . . had been the ones he spent as a captive in Algiers. He had been young and successful."[7] One description of Cathcart's final years suggests that the former consul never received the recognition he had demanded in his correspondence and other writings: "Cathcart was the least content with his circumstances, fuming about his alleged persecution until the last time his pen touched paper."[8]

When William Eaton returned to the United States in 1805, he was briefly celebrated as a war hero. However, the discourse surrounding his purported heroism quickly devolved into partisan bickering. As a critic of Jefferson's alleged restraint during the war, Eaton was more aligned with the Federalist Party. In Congress, Federalists called for Eaton to receive a commemorative sword as well as a gold medal for his conduct in the war. Republicans countered by pointing out that Edward Preble had received a gold medal, suggesting that Eaton, as a subordinate to the commodore, should not receive the same distinction. For Federalists, emphasizing the importance (and bravery) of Eaton's mission by land also served the political purpose of downplaying the role of the navy (which was associated with Jefferson). Republicans emerged victorious, as Eaton was denied any official distinction for his conduct in the war.[9]

During this time, Eaton also became increasingly vocal regarding the alleged betrayal of Hamet. Both the president and Tobias Lear were at the center of this criticism. Unsurprisingly, Federalists once more came to Eaton's defense. In Congress, Federalists inquired what exactly had been promised to Hamet during the war and threatened to refuse

[6] Brett Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire: Three Barbary Captives and American Nation-Building, 1770–1840," (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2016), 130–131.
[7] Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776–1815* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 184.
[8] Goodin, "Opportunities of Empire," 188.
[9] Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 164–165.

ratifying the peace treaty. In his official response to Congress, Thomas Jefferson dismissed any assurances made to Hamet and downplayed the attempted coup d'état by portraying Eaton's mission as the actions of a "zealous citizen."[10] Ultimately, Eaton's outcries only caused a mild stir, and the US Senate ratified the peace treaty while Hamet was provided with some financial relief. Eaton spent the remainder of his life in his native state of Massachusetts. Occasionally, Eaton attempted to ignite old feuds between himself and Jefferson but was unsuccessful in doing so. Removed from the public spotlight, Eaton died an alcoholic in 1811 at the age of forty-seven.[11]

In spite of William Eaton's public protests during the years after the war with Tripoli, the overall focus of US foreign policy gradually shifted toward Europe. While American merchants were now relatively safe from Barbary cruisers, Great Britain emerged as a new threat to US sovereignty. The central conflict was remarkably similar to the source of strife between the US and the Barbary States, i.e. the abduction of American citizens. Whereas the North African regencies captured Americans on the (nominal) basis of religion, British naval commanders exploited confusion over questions of nationality. After the American Revolution, it was often difficult to prove one's country of origin which allowed British warships to inspect American vessels and force suspected British deserters – who allegedly feigned to be Americans – into the mandatory British naval service. This practice is generally referred to as impressment.

The issue of impressment had even been a peripheral concern during the war with Tripoli. In 1803, for example, an American lieutenant wrote a letter to Edward Preble, inquiring what he was supposed to do in cases of Americans being impressed by the British.[12] Another American sailor highlighted the difficulty in resolving questions of citizenship thusly:

> Several of our men have deserted & have taken up their abode on board some of his B.M. Ships & the Commanders have refused to deliver them up & threaten to take from us as many British subjects as we may have on board of any of our vessels . . . I should have no objection to that sort of thing, if they would in return give up to us all the poor Americans they have impressed. I am afraid it will be a business not easily effected. For it appears to be a matter of impossibility to draw a proper line of distinction, by which we may know an American from a British Seaman.[13]

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[10] Quoted in Richard Zacks, *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 333.
[11] For a detailed account of the latter part of Eaton's life, see Zacks, *The Pirate Coast*, 346–370.
[12] Charles Stewart to Edward Preble, October 9, 1803, in Dudley W. Knox ed., *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 6 vols. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), III:121–122. Hereafter referred to as *Naval Documents*.
[13] Ralph Izard to Mrs. Ralph Izard, October 11, 1803, *Naval Documents*, III:127.

The quotation suggests that by 1803, impressment was already of some concern for Americans. However, the question of citizenship also appears somewhat fluid, as some Americans reportedly deserted to voluntarily serve aboard British ships.[14]

In subsequent years, the issue became increasingly one-sided. Approximately ten thousand Americans were impressed between the years 1803 and 1812.[15] As a result, the British encroachments on US sovereignty dominated American political discourse, especially after 1805: "The threat of impressment and lingering American vulnerability in the Atlantic became the central issue in a contest for public support between Federalists and Republicans during Jefferson's second term, as both parties articulated and championed increasingly nationalist positions following the conflict with Tripoli."[16] Tensions further escalated in 1807, when the British *HMS Leopard* intercepted the *USS Chesapeake* off the American coast. During the encounter, the British commander demanded permission to inspect the American ship in search of possible British deserters. The American commander refused. The *Leopard* responded by firing a broadside, heavily damaging the *Chesapeake.* Three American sailors were killed and eighteen were injured. In the aftermath of this so-called *Chesapeake* Affair, the United States came to the brink of war with Great Britain.[17]

Briefly, the Jefferson administration was actively preparing for armed conflict against Great Britain.[18] Ultimately, however, the president and his cabinet proposed to impugn Great Britain economically. In 1807, Congress passed the Embargo Act. The bill suspended American exports to Great Britain and is generally considered one of Thomas Jefferson's greatest foreign policy failures.[19] The legislation's main deficiency rested in the assumption that the United

[14] Captain William Bainbridge's attempt to have the crew of the *Philadelphia* redeemed as British subjects (discussed previously) is yet another example of the malleable nature of citizenship at the time.

[15] Paul A. Gilje, *Free Trade and Sailors Rights in the War of 1812* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 174.

[16] David J. Dzurec III, *Our Suffering Brethren: Foreign Captivity and Nationalism in the Early United States* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019), 110.

[17] Robert P. Watson, *America's First Crisis: The War of 1812* (New York: University of New York Press, 2014), 18–19.

[18] These included a proclamation ordering all armed British ships to leave American waters and a recall of American warships from the Mediterranean. See, Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), 231.

[19] "If seen as an instrument of economic coercion and in light of traditional Republican strategy for securing commercial redress from Great Britain, the embargo of 1807–9 had a strange design, ill-calculated in many respects to achieve its object." See Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *Empire of Liberty: The Statecraft of Thomas Jefferson* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 205. "The result [of the embargo] was an unadulterated calamity that virtually wrecked the American economy." See Joseph J. Ellis *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 237. Gordon S. Wood even speculated that the embargo constituted "perhaps, with the exception of Prohibition, the greatest example in American history of ideology brought to bear on a matter of public policy." See Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 649. Francis Cogliano asserted that "the embargo . . . was a disaster for the American economy." See Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty*, 238.

States could meaningfully affect the British economy: "Britain could have been seriously hurt only if its exports were prevented from reaching America – something that never really happened."[20] Instead, it was American merchants and farmers who bore the full brunt of the embargo. Additionally, American consuls abroad – who relied on American commerce, because they did not receive a salary – were also hurt.[21] The embargo was short-lived and its repeal coincided with President Jefferson's successor, James Madison, taking office. Nevertheless, the Embargo Act constituted another important milestone in the buildup to the War of 1812.

As is the case in any conflict the world over, the origins of war are multifaceted. This was certainly the case in 1812, when Congress formally declared war against Great Britain. There were, for example, American expansionist ambitions coming into conflict with unresolved disputes over the borders of the Western Territories, British support for Indian tribes which attacked American settlers, and lastly a multitude of so-called "War Hawks" entering Congress after the 1810 congressional elections.[22] These are commonly cited as attributing factors to the outbreak of hostilities.

And yet, the issue of impressment was arguably among the more dominant points of contention in the second war against the British. The war's unofficial motto of "Free Trade and Sailors' Rights" has occasionally been interpreted by scholars as a struggle for US national honor. As early as 1962, the historian Norman K. Risjord has argued that the "modern tendency to seek materialistic motives and economic factors in all human relations has greatly obscured one of the basic causes of the War of 1812."[23] Instead, according to Risjord, the idea of defending US national honor played a pivotal role for the understanding of US-British hostilities at the time.[24]

More recently, maritime historian Paul A. Gilje similarly argued that Americans expressed their outrage not so much over the plight of individual sailors who were forced into the British naval service but rather because of what this practice represented for the country at large:

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[20] Andrew Burstein and Nancy Isenberg, *Madison and Jefferson* (New York: Random House, 2010), 451.
[21] Charles Stuart Kennedy, *The American Consul: A History of the United States Consular Service, 1776–1914* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 42.
[22] For a more detailed overview of these factors, see Watson, *America's First Crisis*, 27–62.
[23] Norman K. Risjord, "National Honor as the Unifying Force" in *The Causes of the War of 1812: National Honor or National Interest?*, ed. Bradford Perkins (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 86.
[24] The historian William Weber provides another example of the same basic argument: "For the United States, honor – more specifically, London's acknowledgment of its rights as a sovereign state – trumped interest and fear. The slogan 'Free Trade and Sailors Rights' provided an ideological justification to declare war to protect the nation's honor." See William Weber, *Neither Victor nor Vanquished: America and the War of 1812* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013), 25.

> Americans also believed that they were about to fight a war for reasons that reached beyond their own immediate interests. They were concerned with demonstrating that in a world packed full of monarchs who constantly sought advantage through the raw use of power, a republic, which had done all it could to avoid a war, was capable of waging war to defend itself.[25]

As was the case during the war with Tripoli, a fundamental principle in the reasoning behind these wars was to have claims about the American republic recognized by an international audience – if necessary, through the use of military force.

The most important events of the War of 1812 are generally well-known among historians of the early republic. Conventional narratives of the conflict usually include a failed attempt by the United States to invade Britain's North American provinces (now Canada) as well as the retaliatory torching of the White House by British troops after the invasion of Washington City. Other notable events include the Battle of Baltimore, particularly the flying of the American flag at Fort McHenry after a night of bombardment, which inspired Francis Scott Key to write "The Star-Spangled Banner." Andrew Jackson's victory over the British in the Battle of New Orleans (after the war had already formally ended) is often cited as a pivotal event in the general's career who would eventually serve as seventh president of the United States.[26] Ultimately, most scholars conclude that the war ended without either side having won a decisive victory, as the *status quo ante bellum* was restored.

Perhaps less well-known are the events surrounding Algiers at around the same time. Following the withdrawal of American warships from the Mediterranean after the *Chesapeake* incident, the dey declared war on the United States in 1812. Coinciding with war against Britain, the state of affairs received comparatively little attention by Americans. However, after the Treaty of Ghent had ended the War of 1812, President James Madison requested Congress to declare war on Algiers and subsequently sent several warships to the Mediterranean. The squadron was commanded by Stephen Decatur who had rose to fame for his role in burning the *Philadelphia*. After passing through the Straits of Gibraltar, American warships engaged an Algerian frigate, the *Mashouda*. In what has been described as the "most striking naval victory against the Barbary States," the ship was taken as a prize and several hundred Algerians were taken prisoners of war.[27] Decatur then proceeded to Algiers to enter into negotiations.

As the Algerian fleet was currently at sea in search of enemy vessels, the port of Algiers was rendered virtually defenseless when the American squadron arrived. By means of

[25] Gilje, *Free Trade and Sailors Rights*, 195.
[26] For such a conventional summary of the war's main events, see, for example, Watson, *America's First Crisis*.
[27] John B. Wolf, *The Barbary Coast: Algiers Under the Turks, 1500–1830* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 313.

displaying a formidable naval force and by writing a threatening letter, Stephen Decatur was able to force the dey into a new treaty which did not stipulate annual tribute. Similar to the negotiations with Tripoli a decade earlier, the agreement was reached aboard a US frigate.[28] For the first time in US diplomatic history, an American commander was able to dictate terms to a Barbary regency.

Next, Decatur sailed for the remaining two Barbary States and achieved similar results. In Tunis, Decatur extracted $46,000 from the bey. In Tripoli, still under the rule of Yusuf Qaramanli, Decatur demanded $30,000. After a few rounds of negotiations, the bashaw paid $25,000 and also agreed to release ten Europeans who were held in captivity there.[29] No doubt, the release of the captives served as a nod to European powers that the United States would no longer accept the age-old tradition of Barbary corsairing; "Tributary to no one, Americans could now see themselves as superior to all."[30] This was the last time the United States came into serious conflict with any of the Barbary States.

Decatur's cruise of the Mediterranean is usually referred to as the Second Barbary War and has received relatively little scholarly attention. A notable exception can be found in Frederick C. Leiner's somewhat misleadingly titled monograph *The End of Barbary Terror: America's War Against the Pirates of North Africa* which chronicles the mission's central events in extraordinary detail.[31] For the most part, however, the events in Algiers are generally relegated to a sideshow when compared to the ostensibly far more important war with Great Britain. This gap in scholarship certainly calls for greater exploration with an emphasis on the events of 1815 and beyond.

The year 1815 constituted the beginning of a new era for the United States. Despite the war ending in a stalemate, Americans celebrated the war's conclusion with fervor. Not only did the British vow to end the practice of impressment, many Americans further argued that resisting the British Empire for a second time reaffirmed US autonomy.[32] Hence, the war is sometimes referred to as America's Second War of Independence. In the Mediterranean,

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[28] Kenneth J. Hagan, *This People's Navy: The Making of American Sea Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 92.
[29] Ray W. Irwin, *The Diplomatic Relations of the United States with the Barbary Powers, 1776–1816* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), 180–181.
[30] Lawrence Peskin, *Captives and Countrymen: Barbary Slavery and the American Public, 1785–1816* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009), 202.
[31] According to Leiner, research for the book began prior to September 11, 2001. (This notwithstanding, the title's invocation of the term "terror" certainly suggests a rather misplaced analogy to US foreign policy at the beginning of the 21st century.) See Frederick C. Leiner, *The End of Barbary Terror: America's 1815 War Against the Pirates of North Africa* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 195.
[32] Jasper Trautsch, "Inventing America: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Formation of National Identity, 1789–1815," (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2013), 483.

Americans had achieved a separate victory. After decades of perceived submission, Stephen Decatur was able to dictate American terms to the Barbary States through the display of naval power. As one historian put it: "The golden age of American 'gunboat diplomacy' had dawned."[33]

Some historians cite Decatur's cruise and bombardment of Algiers by the British in 1816 as the end of the Barbary system. In a study of the Barbary States' demise, for example, Daniel Panzac states that after 1816, corsairing activity was "residual" until its "virtual finish."[34] However, recent scholarship suggests that the Barbary States were more persistent than had previously been assumed. According to one recent publication, European vessels were captured well into the 19th century. According to these findings, it was the Congress of Paris in 1856 which marked the ultimate end: "After that, the world in which the Barbary corsairs had operated no longer existed."[35] However, the details of corsairing activities throughout the first half of the 19th century, as well as their eventual end, certainly require greater exploration.

[33] Hagan, *This People's Navy*, 92.
[34] Daniel Panzac, *Barbary Corsairs: The End of a Legend, 1800–1820* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2005), 76.
[35] Caitlin M. Gale, "Barbary's Slow Death: European Attempts to Eradicate North African Piracy in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal for Maritime Research* 18 (2016): 149.

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## Appendix A: Abstract (English)

Title: "All the World's a Stage" – Honor, Shame, and Publicity in US Relations with the Barbary States, 1785–1805

This dissertation is an investigation of US relations with the so-called Barbary States. Situated on the North African coast, these were the independent Kingdom of Morocco as well as the Ottoman provinces of Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis. Between the 15th and 19th century, these states were in the practice of capturing and enslaving European sailors in the Mediterranean. Subsequently, captives could be ransomed, or annual tribute could exempt European nations from this practice altogether. After the United States lost British naval protection as a consequence of the Revolutionary War, Americans were likewise confronted with this impediment to commerce in the Mediterranean. Following the enslavement of American citizens by Algerian cruisers in the 1780s and 1790s (as well as their subsequent release through a costly ransom payment), the United States established a diplomatic network in the Mediterranean and appointed consuls to the Barbary States. In 1801, the Bashaw of Tripoli declared war on the United States, resulting in a military conflict that lasted until 1805.

By examining the correspondence of US diplomats, statesmen, naval officers, and captured sailors, it is argued in this thesis that the actions of those American foreign policy makers who were involved in diplomacy with the Barbary States were predominantly informed by the desire to establish, protect, and advance their personal honor as well as the honor of their country. The extant writings of the sailor-turned-diplomat James Leander Cathcart provide the foundation for a case study in the relevance of personal honor. In this context, it is asserted that Cathcart's journals and correspondence constitute a prolonged attempt at having claims about his social rank as an honorable person validated by his peers or even the general public. However, Cathcart was by and large unsuccessful in this endeavor which resulted in rhetorical outbursts and rivalries throughout his career. As such, Cathcart's writings demonstrate the consequences of honor claims not being recognized. Furthermore, they show that even common sailors adhered to codes of honor, testifying for the importance of the concept even among non-elite circles.

On the national level, perceived humiliations such as the capture of American sailors, the payment of ransom and annual tribute, as well as the inability of the United States to resist extravagant demands of Barbary rulers were frequently argued to constitute profound violations of US national honor. The supposed publicity of these ostensibly shameful episodes was given special consideration in this context. To remedy these perceived failures of American foreign policy, virtually all of those involved in either diplomacy or military operations frequently invoked the language of national honor to justify increasingly belligerent actions against the Barbary States. US relations with the Barbary States must then be understood as a protracted attempt at establishing the United States as a respectable – an honorable – nation in the eyes of imagined audiences, both in United States as well as Europe. In a larger sense, it is hoped that this dissertation serves to highlight the prevalence of national honor in foreign relations during the early modern period.

## Appendix B: Zusammenfassung (Deutsch)

Titel: “All the World’s a Stage” – Honor, Shame, and Publicity in US Relations with the Barbary States, 1785–1805

Diese Dissertation ist eine Untersuchung US-amerikanischer Beziehungen mit den sog. „Barbareskenstaaten“. Dies waren das unabhängige Königreich Marokko sowie die osmanischen Provinzen Tripolis, Tunis und Algiers. Zwischen dem 15. und 19. Jahrhundert fuhren von diesen Staaten ausgehend Korsaren aus, um europäische Seefahrer im Mittelmeer zu ergreifen und zu versklaven. Sklaven, die auf diese Weise ergriffen wurden, konnten mit Lösegeldzahlungen wieder freigekauft werden bzw. ein jährlich gezahlter Tribut konnte europäische Staaten auch gänzlich von dieser Praktik befreien. Nachdem die USA aufgrund der Folgen des Unabhängigkeitskriegs den Schutz der britischen Marine verloren, wurden diese gleichermaßen mit dieser Beeinträchtigung des Handels im Mittelmeer konfrontiert. In den 1780er- und 1790er-Jahren fielen US-Bürger algerischen Korsaren zum Opfer, die später durch Lösegeldzahlungen wieder freigekauft wurden. Daraufhin etablierten die Vereinigten Staaten ein diplomatisches Netzwerk im Mittelmeer und es wurden auch Konsulate in den Barbareskenstaaten eröffnet. Trotz dieser Bemühungen erklärte der Regent von Tripolis den Vereinigten Staaten 1801 den Krieg. Dieser Konflikt dauerte bis 1805 an.

Durch eine Untersuchung der Korrespondenz US-amerikanischer Diplomaten, Staatsmänner, Marineoffizieren und versklavten Seefahrern wird in dieser Dissertation dafür plädiert, dass die Handlungen dieser Verantwortlichen der US-Außenpolitik vorrangig von einem Verlangen getrieben waren, persönliche Ehre sowie die Ehre einer amerikanischen Nation zu etablieren, zu schützen und voranzutreiben. Das hinterbliebene Werk des Seefahrers und Diplomaten James Leander Cathcart ist hier die Grundlage einer Fallstudie zur Rolle persönlicher Ehre. Die Kernthese ist in diesem Kontext, dass Cathcarts Tagebucheinträge und Korrespondenz einen langjährigen Versuch darstellen, Behauptungen über seinen sozialen Rang validiert zu sehen und als ehrbare Person in den Augen seiner Mitmenschen bzw. der breiteren Öffentlichkeit betrachtet zu werden. In diesem Bestreben war Cathcart jedoch weitestgehend nicht erfolgreich, was sich während seiner Karriere als Diplomat wiederholt in emotionalen Ausbrüchen und Rivalitäten widerspiegelte. Die Schriften Cathcarts zeigen dementsprechend auf, was passierte, wenn Aussagen über persönliche Ehre im weiteren Umfeld nicht anerkannt wurden. Darüber hinaus zeigt der Fall Cathcart auf, dass auch einfache Seefahrer einem Ehrenkodex folgten, was wiederum die Relevanz des Konzeptes widerspiegelt, auch in nichtelitären Kreisen.

Auf der nationalen Ebene wurde das Versklaven von amerikanischen Seefahrern, das Zahlen von Lösegeld und jährlichem Tribut sowie die Unfähigkeit der USA, sich Forderungen der Barbareskenstaaten zu widersetzen als Demütigung und damit als Verletzung nationaler Ehre empfunden. Die vermeintliche öffentliche Aufmerksamkeit dieser Episoden wurde dabei gesondert berücksichtigt. Um dieses vermeintliche Versagen der Außenpolitik zu beheben, bedienten nahezu sämtliche Personen in diplomatischen und militärischen Kreisen des Vokabulars nationaler Ehre, um zunehmend extremere Maßnahmen gegen die Barbareskenstaaten zu rechtfertigen. Die Außenpolitik der Vereinigten Staaten sollte dann als ein andauernder Versuch interpretiert werden, die USA als respektable – als ehrbare – Nation zu präsentieren, sowohl gegenüber der amerikanischen als der europäischen Öffentlichkeit. In einem weiteren Sinne soll diese Dissertation ebenfalls die Relevanz des Konzepts der nationalen Ehre im Kontext der Außenpolitik während der Frühen Neuzeit aufzeigen.

## Appendix C: Lebenslauf – Marius Kleinknecht

Der Lebenslauf ist aus Gründen des Datenschutzes in der Onlineversion nicht enthalten.