

White Slaves in Barbary: The Early American Republic, Orientalism and the Barbary Pirates

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“In this work, I have most attempted a full description of the many hellish torments and punishments those piratical sea-rovers invent and inflict on the unfortunate Christians who may by chance unhappily fall into their hands...”³⁸ wrote John Foss, an American sailor captured by pirates off the coast of North Africa and sold into slavery in 1793. Many other captives were not as reserved, describing the pirate’s bloody attacks with colorful, titillating language that provoked outrage in early America. Although often exaggerated or forged, the Orientalist stereotypes perpetuated about the Barbary Pirates by captives like John Foss would resonate in the minds of early Americans and shape American foreign policy.

These first encounters with North Africa through the pirates set a precedent for how the young nation would engage with belligerent powers in the future. While European superpowers paid tribute and appeased the Barbary nations in order to incapacitate their economic rivals on the seas, the American Congress commissioned a naval fleet and prepared for war. The language used in the accounts of the Barbary captives, in the colonial American newspapers, and by the founding fathers demonstrates that the legend of the Barbary pirates shaped American views of “the Orient,” which led to acceptance of aggressive foreign policy in the Mediterranean.

³⁸ John D. Foss. “Together with some account of the treatment of Christian Slaves When Sick: -- and Observations on the Manners and Customs of the Algerines.” (Newburyport, MA: A. March 1798) in Paul Baepler, ed. *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 73.

If, as Marwan Obeidat claims, “the “Barbary pirates” affair sums up what Americans knew of the Muslim World until the 1970s,”³⁹ then understanding what it was that the Americans thought they knew of the Muslim World becomes of utmost importance. Who were the Barbary pirates, and why did America go to war with them?

This paper will offer an in-depth analysis of these fierce corsairs, purported “mor [sic] like ravones [sic] beasts then men,”⁴⁰ and the circumstances surrounding their repeated conflicts with the early American Republic. I will explain the Barbary pirates and their governing regencies, and the nature of North African slavery, along with the contemporary conceptions of culture and religion. I will discuss the various experiences found in the captive narratives, as well as how the Orientalist language used in these exaggerated accounts shaped American opinions and policies regarding these Muslim corsairs. From this, it becomes evident that the American public supported the military operations against the Barbary powers in the Tripolitan War of 1801 and the Algerine War of 1815 in part because of the constant and widespread inaccurate Orientalist and overtly racist portrayals of the North African corsairs. In dehumanizing the “other”, the writers of these narratives convinced the American public of the young nation’s need to assert itself and triumph over a barbarous oppressor, and heralded the stirrings of imperialism.

I. The Barbary Pirates & Powers

³⁹ Marwan M. Obeidat. “Royall Tyler’s The Algerine Captive and the Barbary Orient: An Example of America’s Early Literary Awareness of the Near East,” in *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol.5, Issue 2, 1998, 256.

⁴⁰ Words of Abraham Browne, as cited in Giles Milton, *White Gold: The Extraordinary Story of Thomas Pellow and North Africa’s One Million European Slaves*. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2004), 61.

The legend of the Barbary pirates is one shrouded in countless American-centered misnomers.⁴¹ Many of the negative stereotypes perpetuated by the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Americans persist today. Countless popular books written about the North African corsairs, for example, emphasize the “avowed Islamic” pirates who were part of “a medieval autocracy whose credo was piracy and terror,” and who “professed to despise Christians.” They compare the Barbary Powers to today’s modern terrorists, claiming that “while the Barbary War resembles today’s war on terror tactically and strategically, it resonates most deeply in its assertion of free trade, human rights, and freedom from tyranny and terror.”⁴²

As with most writing produced in “contact zones,”⁴³ these anachronistic and grossly inaccurate views reveal more about America than they do about the history of the Barbary pirates. Similarly, while the early American captives’ narratives reflect the Barbary pirates’ cruelty, they are a more valuable evidence of European-American perceptions of North African Islamic culture. Therefore, while this paper will discuss the Barbary pirates, the purpose is to understand how misguided stereotypes of the past influenced early America’s aggressive foreign policy towards the Barbary powers.

I will take a moment here to explain the terms that crop up repeatedly in this essay. “Barbary” was the accepted British and American all-purpose term used for the entirety of the North African region, excluding Egypt. Ann Thompson maintains that “...it is possible to discern a set of attitudes and reactions concerning Barbary in general. It was

⁴¹ Richard Parker’s *Uncle Sam in Barbary: A Diplomatic History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004) accuses the bibliography of the Barbary pirates relations with the United States of being severely Americocentric in his forward, p.xvi.

⁴² Joseph Wheelan. *Jefferson’s War: America’s First War on Terror 1801-1805*. (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), xxiv, xxvi

⁴³ Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. (London: Routledge, 1992), 4. Pratt defines “contact zones” as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.”

felt to possess a certain unity, despite the differences which were seen to exist between the different Regencies...⁴⁴ The term does not acknowledge the diverse people of this broad region: Arabs, Berbers, Jews, Moriscoes, expatriate Europeans, Levantines, Turkish/Ottoman soldiers, and other various tribal people.⁴⁵ Despite the problematic nature of the term, it is used often in both the primary and secondary sources, and so I use it as well to avoid confusion.

The term “pirate” in this context is also controversial. Pirates of all sorts had been pillaging ships and making slaves of the crew and passengers onboard for as long as people have sailed on the Mediterranean. “For centuries, the normal occupation of thousands of men in the Mediterranean was to set sail from their home ports in order to attack the shipping or the coastal regions of the area.”⁴⁶ The Barbary corsairs were a fraction of the various people making their fortunes through plunder rather than through trade, and Paul Baepler points out that “the Barbary corsairs themselves originated in part from the need to defend North Africa from European aggression.”⁴⁷

Contrary to the popular understanding of the term “Barbary pirate,” the men on the North African ships were more privateers or corsairs, than pirates. They were part of several organized governmental systems, and were bound under their regencies’ strict laws. They were not free to plunder indiscriminately, and were often called upon by their ruling regencies to function as naval powers. As Peter Earle points out about the typical Barbary corsair: “In his own world, he was no outlaw.”⁴⁸ Instead of understanding the

⁴⁴ Ann Thompson. *Barbary and Enlightenment: European Attitudes Towards the Mahgreb in the 18th Century*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), 6.

⁴⁵ Linda Colley. *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 44.

⁴⁶ Peter Earle. *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*. (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), 6.

⁴⁷ Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 3.

⁴⁸ Earle, 179.

corsairs to be privateers of their respective regencies or nations, as most European powers did, the Americans called them pirates, drawing an inaccurate comparison to the terrifying cutthroat freebooters of the Caribbean who operated under no laws save their own.

The Barbary pirates were also not a homogenous group. Linda Colley points out that the whole area of North Africa was somewhat of a puzzle to Americans. The Muslims there were multicultural, urban, commercial, monotheistic, literate, and somewhat light-skinned.⁴⁹ At the time America went to War with Tripoli in 1801 and later with Algiers in 1815, the North African coast was divided into several different regencies and kingdoms, each an inheritor of a separate and distinct culture. Morocco was its own kingdom, while Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli were semi-autonomous regencies held in the Ottoman Empire through feudal-style alliances.⁵⁰ They functioned as separate entities; much like the countries of Europe did, and descended from different tribes. Each regency and kingdom had its own ruler, set of laws and customs, and its own corsairs. They declared war separately, and negotiated peace treaties separately. This meant that, in theory, only the corsairs of the regency or kingdom at war with America would pose a threat to American ships and shipping.

To understand the motivations for Barbary corsairing, it is important to understand the differences between the American and the North African economies. While previously, both European and Barbary corsairs raided one another's ships and the Mediterranean coastlines,

The Industrial Revolution, which was beginning to transform the face of Europe, sent scarcely a ripple to the shores of North Africa. The seizure of

⁴⁹ Colley, 107-110.

⁵⁰ E. B. Potter, ed. *Sea Power: A Naval History*. (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1981).

prizes and the enslavement of captives remained an essential if anachronist prop of its still primitive economies.⁵¹

So while America transitioned from widespread illicit commerce and privateering to more of what they understood to be legitimate trade, the North African economies were still mainly agricultural, and propped up by preying on the vessels of other nations. In addition to this, the “great majority of people in the Mediterranean lived under conditions of extreme poverty,” so the allure of being a Barbary corsair, a “professional hunter in pursuit of sanctioned quarry,” was great. It was the only profession available in North Africa where a pauper could become rich enough to afford the kinds of possessions and lifestyles only government employees could have.⁵²

To recap, the term “Barbary pirate” was a blanket term invented by Europeans with a poor understanding of the variety of people and cultures present in the North African Mediterranean. As so many of the sources utilize this term, this essay will continue to name the various corsairs of Morocco, Tripoli, Algiers and Tunis as Barbary pirates/corsairs to avoid confusion. These corsairs worked for their respective rulers, (called deys, beys, and bashaws/pashas) selectively and legally incapacitating the vessels of the nations on which their ruler declared war. The corsairs were “Operating within the limits of then current international practice, much like their contemporaries in America, Britain, France, Holland, Italy and Malta, among other places.”⁵³

In fact, Europe allowed the Barbary States to operate under the policy of tribute and encouraged the plundering corsairs. Every year, each ruler of the regencies or

⁵¹ Stephen Clissold. *The Barbary Slaves*. (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), 150.

⁵² Michael Baepler. *White Slavery in Africa: The Barbary Captivity Narrative in American Literature*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996), 20-22.

⁵³Parker, 6.

Morocco reviewed its status with the other nations that participated in Mediterranean shipping. The deys, beys, and pashas would demand tribute from each European state. This tribute would serve as insurance; every state that paid the asking price would be guaranteed a year free of attacks upon its ships. Usually, the price was less than the cost of equipping a naval fleet for war against the Barbary powers, and most nations chose to pay.

Each country felt that as long as their ships and their nationals were protected from the depredations of the corsairs, then the fact that the ships and nationals of other countries were captured could only be to their advantage, in that it hindered the development of rival merchant marines.⁵⁴

Clissold points out that the Barbary rulers found it wiser to look for smaller prey that could not so easily afford the tribute. Nations like Denmark, Sweden, and the newly formed American republic were preferred targets.⁵⁵ While the American colonies were still under British rule, their ships flew the British Union Jack, and were protected under Britain's treaty with the various Barbary powers. However, "American problems with these four governments began almost from the moment of independence."⁵⁶ Barbary powers began demanding tribute from the American ex-colonies, and while America made up its mind as to how to deal with the Barbary threat, the pirates plundered American ships, and captured and enslaved the Americans onboard.

George Washington believed that Britain sought to keep America dependent, and welcomed Barbary attacks on American vessels.⁵⁷ A letter from M. Salva (the secretary of the imperial agent in Barbary) to Benjamin Franklin also notes this suspicion: "...and

⁵⁴ Earle, 266.

⁵⁵ Clissold, 149.

⁵⁶ Craig L. Symonds, *Historical Atlas of the U.S. Navy*, (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 28.

⁵⁷ Frank Lambert. *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 76.

the politics of certain European powers do not restrain them from paying tribute to enjoy peace; they make use of these human harpies as a terror to the belligerent nations.”⁵⁸

Linda Colley agrees. Not only did Britain relish the Barbary pirates stamping out her economic competitors, but “without the aid of Barbary, Britain could never have maintained its Mediterranean empire.”⁵⁹

Most European communities worked out ways of financing the tribute, or collecting sufficient funds to buy back, or redeem their captured kin from slavery in North Africa. For example, the German cities of Hamburg and Lübeck financed the *Sklavenkasse* (literal translation: “Slave bursary”) from a tax on shipping so that there would always be funds available for redeeming prisoners. Swedish sailors paid a portion of their earnings into a kitty that functioned in a similar way to the *Sklavenkasse*.⁶⁰ I use these examples to show that Europe had a long history of negotiating with the Barbary pirates and their rulers, either by paying the tribute necessary to guarantee safety, or mitigating the circumstances of the Barbary attacks.

Europe’s refusal to collectively stamp out the Barbary threat can be understood within context. While the Barbary pirates were a nuisance, they did not devastate Mediterranean trade. In the 1790s, for example, the Barbary pirates captured fewer than thirty ships. During this time France was undergoing its own Revolution, and French privateers captured 300 vessels.⁶¹ During the American Revolution just a few decades before, America relied heavily on privateering to weaken Great Britain and to plunder

⁵⁸ M. Salva to Benjamin Franklin, April 1, 1783 in Jareth Sparks, ed. *Diplomatic Correspondence of the American Revolution IV*, (Boston: N. Hale and Gray & Bowen, 1829-1830).

⁵⁹ Colley, 69.

⁶⁰ See Peter Earle. *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary*. (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1970), 87. and Jacques Heers. *The Barbary Corsairs: Warfare in the Mediterranean, 1480-1580*. Translated by Jonathan North. (London: Greenhill Books, 2001), 217.

⁶¹ Lambert, 95.

desperately needed supplies to sustain the war. The Barbary pirates committed the same acts as John Paul Jones, for example, who was hailed as America's greatest Revolutionary naval hero and promoted to admiral. The Barbary pirates, too, had permission from their governments to plunder vessels of those powers they were at war with, and like the American or French privateers, they always gave their governments a predetermined share of the loot.⁶²

Frank Lambert points out that merchants and pirates came from different historical and cultural assumptions about how the world operated. For the deys, beys, and pashas in control of the various North African regencies, operating under a tribute system was a fair way to finance nations. Both the United States and the Barbary powers wanted stable economies, and each side operated under their own cultural assumptions to try to achieve this for themselves: Americans through more free trade and commerce, and coastal North Africans through agriculture and wartime spoils.⁶³ Despite this shift in the American economy, Americans still condoned privateering as a legitimate act of warfare, just as early modern Europe and North Africa did.

II. The Accounts of White Slaves in North Africa

The eighteenth and nineteenth century American and North African economies also had in common a dependence on slave labor. Slavery in North Africa provided diverse

⁶² Earle explains the institutionalized rules of plunder. According to the Koran, one-fifth of income should go to God, or to God's representative on earth: the head of state. Other proportions of the loot went for the upkeep of the port. After this, half of it went to the owners of the ship (which could be again the state, or a private owner, or occasionally a Barbary pirate who had invested well), and the other half was divided among the crew according to an agreement that was satisfactory to all involved in obtaining the booty. See Earle, 72-75.

⁶³ Lambert, 100-115.

experiences for the enslaved. Slavery was a traditional institution of most Islamic civilizations, as well as in the Americas. According to Muslim law, no Muslim could enslave another. The majority of slaves in Barbary therefore consisted of Africans from the interior of the continent, or Europeans and Americans captured on enemy ships. The Barbary pirates attacked European and American ships, instead of one another, because white Christian slaves were the most profitable cargo.⁶⁴

Christian slaves captured in this way had very diverse experiences as slaves in North Africa. Those Christians with status or from wealthy families were often bought from the Barbary pirates at the North African slave markets for the specific purpose of holding out for ransom from families or governments. While the Christians waited for their freedom, they were put to work to earn their keep and make profit for their masters. This could mean any number of things: rowing on the galleys, working on a chain gang performing construction work, or using their skills (sailing, literacy, sewing, mathematics, etc.) to do more specialized work. “Barbary economy and society rested on slavery, and slaves could be found in practically every occupation.”⁶⁵

Humphrey Fisher, in his study of slavery in Muslim Africa found that while the Barbary corsairs took slaves from the ships they preyed on in the Mediterranean or Atlantic, Christian whites were a very small minority of the types of slaves taken for ransom.⁶⁶ They were considered prisoners-of-war, and could be ransomed and redeemed, or sent home if a peace was signed between their country and the enslaving regency. If they converted to Islam, they could rise to high social and political positions within the

⁶⁴ Earle, 12, 76.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 77-82.

⁶⁶ Humphrey J. Fisher. *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa*. (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 317-335.

state. The white slaves from the Levant (Georgians and Circassians) were regarded more as “objects of commerce” and not prisoners, so while they couldn’t look forward to repatriation, they were still able to rise in rank. The black slaves marched up from the African interior had the worst circumstances, and were rarely eligible for social mobility.⁶⁷ Despite this, the loudest slave voices from North Africa are those of the Europeans and Americans captured by the Barbary Pirates. Their accounts remain behind, and from them, we have a good idea of what their experiences in North Africa were like.

Some of the Christian American slaves experienced tremendous hardships, hunger, and felt that they were left to “rely on the mercy of sanguinary barbarians.”⁶⁸ They were often confined to long hours of harsh, physical labor, and subsisted off of a limited diet of coarse bread, vinegar, and olives. They slept in overcrowded bagnios⁶⁹ and were vulnerable to harsh corporal punishment by arbitrary drivers for minor infractions. Because of these conditions, they were the most susceptible to communicable diseases, and many died before returning home.

Peter Earle reminds us that in North African slavery, “Horrors there certainly were, but life could be pleasant, as well.”⁷⁰ Other white Christian slaves had better experiences in captivity. Earle found evidence of some slaves that did so well in Barbary that they did not want to return home. They had the option of converting and then were free to live as any North African Muslim would. They could marry, hold titles, and bequeath their

⁶⁷ Earle, 81.

⁶⁸ William Ray. “Horrors of Slavery, or the American Tars in Tripoli,” (Troy, NY: Oliver Lyon, 1808), in Baeppler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 194.

⁶⁹ The bagnio was the slave prison where slaves that were not kept with their owners at night could sleep and store their belongings. Reports of the bagnios range from reasonable but sparse accommodation, to filthy holes in the ground, and in all likelihood, the conditions varied from bagnio to bagnio.

⁷⁰ Earle, 82.

fortunes to their Muslim children. The slave not wishing to convert could succeed in business, pay off his ransom, and continue as a free Christian merchant. Some slaves even became Barbary corsairs themselves, opting for the risky, yet opportunistic lifestyle. Two captives, Dr. Cowdery and William Ray both mention a “renegado Scotchman”⁷¹ by the name of Lysle/Lysh, who converted to Islam, took the Tripolitan name of Murad Rais, married the Bey Jussef Bashaw’s sister, and worked as a Barbary corsair for the regency.

Several of the slave narratives mention certain freedoms despite their slave status. If a slave did have the money or leisure, he was free to enjoy the amenities of the city, “he could make use of those institutions as freely as any Turk or Moor.”⁷² Dr. Cowdery, for example, was treated reasonably because his medical skills had saved the Bashaw’s son. He enjoyed a varied diet including North African treats like dried fruits and nuts, and was permitted to wander the marketplaces and purchase “figs, watermelons, muskmelons, and cucumbers,” in addition to being “plentifully supplied with squashes and cucumbers” and being treated to food “prepared in the Turkish style” that was “simple and good.”⁷³ William Ray, who served on the same ship as Dr. Cowdery, had a significantly more difficult time in his enslavement. Nevertheless, he also enjoyed some freedoms. He talks about his fellow sailors in the bagnios “who had the good fortune to save a little money, were permitted to go to the market, to purchase vegetables.” At another point, they were led through a courtyard with

⁷¹ Jonathan Cowdery. “American Captives in Tripoli; or, Dr. Cowdery’s Journal in Miniature. Kept During his Late Captivity in Tripoli. 2nd ed.” (Boston: Belcher and Armstrong, 1806) in Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 166.

⁷² Clissold, 50.

⁷³ Cowdery, 170.

a dozen beautiful females, who came from the piazzas above. As the women in the streets are constantly wrapped and muffled up in blankets, which conceal their shapes and faces, except one eye, this to us, was a novel sight; for the ladies were exposed to view, as much as the half-naked belles of our own towns. They were fantastically wrapped in loose robes of striped silk; their arms necks and bosoms bare... They brought us dates, olives, oranges and milk.⁷⁴

American sailor James Leander Cathcart, who served on an American privateering vessel during the Revolutionary War, was another slave whose experiences in Barbary were not all negative. Cathcart thrived in North Africa, and in his eleven years as a slave in Algiers, he became an entrepreneur. He owned taverns in the bagnios, financed maritime adventures, and obtained the enviable paid position of Chief Christian Secretary to the Algerian dey. In his position, he was able to help resolve diplomatic crises between Algiers and America, and intervene on behalf of the other American slaves. After negotiating his release, Cathcart voluntarily returned to North Africa as the US Consul to Tripoli and Tunis. A similar thing had happened earlier, in 1690, where Rene Lemaire, a French slave in Algiers was nominated acting consul and acted as a go-between for Dey Cha'ban of Algiers and King Louis XIV.⁷⁵

There are no doubts that most white slaves taken by the Barbary pirates and enslaved in North Africa yearned for their freedom and homeland, at least at first. Nevertheless, "...both white and black slaves in North Africa lived more diverse lives, and sometimes much freer lives, than the majority of plantation slaves in the Caribbean or American South."⁷⁶ Slavery in North Africa and in the New World (the Americas) cannot be likened at all. Baepler makes the point that "on the surface, the Barbary Captivity narrative appears to invert the situation of the American slave narrative by presenting the

⁷⁴ Ray, 195-196.

⁷⁵ Clissold, 51-52.

⁷⁶ Colley, 59.

testimony of a white slave under African domination rather than a black slave subjugated by a white owner,”⁷⁷ but the basis for comparison is spurious at best. North African slavery was not institutionalized chattel slavery like in the plantations of the Americas. The white slaves in Barbary were not born into captivity or taken from their homeland, and many had the option of returning to their previous lives, whereas a black Anglo-American slave, even if freed, did not have that option. Richard Parker points out that Americans “found the concept of white Americans being enslaved outrageous, even though they were engaged in the slave trade themselves.”⁷⁸

With this understanding of the Barbary pirates, the regencies they worked for, the type of activities they were involved with, and slavery in Muslim North Africa along the Barbary Coast, we can move to the American and European captivity narratives⁷⁹. I will explain the types of narratives the American public was exposed to in the several decades leading up to the Tripolitan and Algerine Wars.

The captivity narratives captured a wide variety of experiences, as the white slave’s experiences in North Africa were incredibly diverse. By the 1620s, the Barbary captivity narrative had begun to establish itself as a recognizable genre in Europe. The Barbary narratives gained height of popularity during the American Revolution in America, and were soon thereafter compared with black American slave narratives, like that of Frederick Douglass⁸⁰. They were usually published in broadsides, pamphlets, almanacs, or as short novels, but the occasional poem or newspaper article also brought

⁷⁷ Baepler. *White Slavery in Africa*, 86.

⁷⁸ Parker, xiv.

⁷⁹ In this essay, I examine European captivity narratives that were published or disseminated in America, as well as the American narratives, as the language used in both would have shaped public opinion in early America.

⁸⁰ Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 25-29.

the Barbary captivity genre to an American audience. In the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, early America's most prominent newspaper, there are several instances of books about the Barbary pirates or the North African regencies and kingdoms, printed in Britain, for sale in the colonies. For example, in May 30, 1751, there is a notice in the newspaper about a list of books imported in the ship *Wandsworth* by Capt. Smith, to be sold by David Hall in the post office. Among the list is a book called *History of the Pyratival States of Barbary*.⁸¹

Many of the captivity accounts were published multiple times in different places. Dr. Cowdery published excerpts of his journal in several newspapers, and Baepler speculates that it was because of their favorable reception that he was encouraged to publish the condensed version of his journal in 1806.⁸² The account of sailor Robert Adams was “the most international narrative of all the Barbary captivity narratives,” with editions appearing in London, Boston, Paris, Stockholm, and Amsterdam. Baepler found several comments of the account peppered in various magazines.⁸³ The account of Maria Martin was published in eleven editions over the course of just over a decade.⁸⁴ In total, the American narratives would eventually appear in over 100 editions and in several languages. From these facts, and from the articles and commentary that appeared in newspapers as the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, it is certain that the majority of early Americans would have been aware of, and outraged by the actions of the Barbary pirates.

Paul Baepler discovered further evidence of the widespread awareness of the Barbary pirates: In 1693 five New Yorkers were reported captured by the Barbary

⁸¹ “Just Imported in the *Wandsworth*, Capt. Smith, and to be Sold,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 30, 1751.

⁸² Cowdery, 160.

⁸³ Baepler. *White Slavery in Africa*, 155.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 96.

Pirates. The governor intervened and publicized a collection. The governor and churches were able to collect 400 pounds sterling from 4,302 contributors. The report later turned out to be a fabrication, but “the highly public nature of these solicitations and the number of contributors to the redemption of captives assures us that the story of Barbary piracy was widely disseminated.”⁸⁵ In the 1790s, Congress fashioned a ploy to deceive the Barbary states into thinking that congress was prepared to sacrifice some citizens for the honor of the nation. Increasing numbers of Americans demanded freedom for the hostages, and “by 1794, public pressure caused congress to abandon this ploy and make freeing slaves a priority.”⁸⁶

Because those slaves that did make it back to America were usually left destitute from paying back their ransom, “one of the ways in which they could restore their fortunes was to publish their tales, in the hope of earning a few shillings.”⁸⁷ These stories, although eyewitness accounts, invariably must have sold better if embellished for the audience. Baepler points out that most writers of these fantastic tales referred to previous captivity narratives and what had already been written about Africa for advice on how to construct their accounts.⁸⁸

Due to this newfound popularity, several fictional captivity narratives began to surface, and some, like that of Maria Martin, were passed off as nonfiction at the time of their publication and dissemination for profit. As Baepler advocates: “If the fictional was sometimes read as true, then fiction helped to shape history, and we need to view these

⁸⁵ Baepler. *White Slavery in Africa*, 45.

⁸⁶ Lambert, 119.

⁸⁷ Milton, 7.

narratives side by side.”⁸⁹ They are equally useful in describing the impact the Barbary pirates had on the American psyche. The fictional and forged accounts have much to tell us about how the American public at large conceived of the Barbary pirates, and of Africans. Furthermore, the presence of fictional accounts attests to the demand for the Barbary captivity narratives, and demonstrates that the American audience was hungry for more details of the exotic “Other”.

III. Orientalism and the Depiction of the North African Piratical “Other”

Peter Earle remarks that “Epithets such as ruthless, cruel, debauched or sadistic are commonplace in the descriptions of pirates or corsairs in popular novels.”⁹⁰ They are repeated, in one form or another, throughout all of the captivity narratives. In fact, the repetition of stereotypes is the one thing the varied narratives all have in common. Parker points out that “fabrication, exaggeration, and ignorance, not to mention ingrained stereotyping” were a part of every Barbary captivity narrative.⁹¹ The accounts “were never simply stories about individuals under stress, but commentaries on, and by-products of changing power relations over time.”⁹²

The narratives also served as some of America’s first impressions of Islamic Africa. They were riddled with certain myths that reinforced the negative Orientalist stereotypes. Before discussing the various myths perpetuated by the language in the Barbary captivity narratives, an explanation of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, and how the

⁸⁹ Ibid, 12.

⁹⁰ Earle, 179.

⁹¹ Parker, 3.

concept applies to the accounts written by the European and American captives of the Barbary pirates will prove useful.

Edward Said's theories on Orientalism were and still are some of the most influential ideas regarding Western dialogue about the Middle East. His work is groundbreaking and controversial, and started an entire discourse about how cultures perceive one another amidst unequal power relations. His book, *Orientalism*, describes the ignorant assumptions and stereotypes that pervade the Western attitude towards the Middle East, and the prejudices and actions that occurred as a result of these misguided stereotypes. His main point is that the imperialistic and colonizing behaviors of Europe and later, the United States, can be explained through the ways these deep-seated assumptions and stereotypes were made to justify imperial expansion. In other words, Europeans and Americans remained ignorant regarding the Middle East and Islamic Culture (which they have traditionally grouped together as simply "the Orient"), and based their assumptions on a series of stereotypes which later helped them to justify the brutalities of empire-building.

Edward Said mentions the Barbary pirates as part of the limited American experience of the Orient.⁹³ The Orient itself, he argues, was almost a European invention, and had been "since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences."⁹⁴ European culture (and here I include early America because they were a colony of Britain for a great part of their awareness of the Barbary pirates) managed and produced the orient and gained in strength by defining

⁹³ Edward Said. *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 290.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 1.

itself in opposition to the Orient.⁹⁵ This is why the Barbary narratives of Europeans and Americans captured by the pirates say more about early modern Europe and America and Western intentions regarding the Orient, than they do about the Barbary pirates and their culture.

Said explains that the relationship between the Orient and the Western powers (Europe and America) was one that was never equal, and always about power and domination. The West was able to construct its own identity as a superior one in comparison with Eastern people and cultures. He argues that European and American interest was always political, from the start of interaction. Said explains that

While it is true to say that the United States did not in fact become a world empire until the twentieth century, it is also true that during the nineteenth century the United States was concerned with the Orient in ways that prepared for its later, overtly imperial concern.⁹⁶

This means that Orientalism functions as the exchange between the individual writers of the texts about the Orient (in this case, the authors of the captive narratives) and the political concerns shaped by the “three great empires” (Britain, France, America).⁹⁷

These concerns were largely imperial and determined by Western expansion in search of markets, resources and colonies. In the denunciations of Barbary, Americans could see the North African cultures in terms of backwardness and immorality. By projecting this divide between East and West, or between themselves and North Africa, it became justifiable to invade and dominate. Mary Louise Pratt agrees that accounts by Westerners about non-European parts of the world created the domestic subjects of imperialism. Pratt

⁹⁵ Marwan Obeidat agrees that “in their perception of the Barbary Wars, American writers generally relied on traditional European views and stereotypes...” in Obeidat, 257.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 293.

⁹⁷ Said, 15.

agrees that these types of writings later legitimized the Western aspirations of economic expansion and empire.⁹⁸

So although America could not yet be considered an “empire” in the early stages of the republic, it had inherited the European, primarily British ideas and attitudes towards non-Europeans, and non-whites. Therefore, everything Americans wrote or read of the Orient, or the Barbary Coast, in this example, was written from this viewpoint. This viewpoint caused the American and European writers to generalize, stereotype, and denigrate the Orient and its people in their accounts. My argument is that this phenomenon of Western writings about the Barbary pirates and powers reinforced the stereotypes Americans believed about North Africa and the Muslim corsairs of the Barbary Coast. The acceptance of these Orientalist stereotypes led to the dehumanization of these people in the American mind, and to public acceptance of the Tripolitan and the Algerian wars.

With this understanding of Orientalism, I will point out the most pervasive stereotypes perpetuated in the captivity accounts available in America, so that it becomes evident how the types of Orientalist language used by the Western writers in describing the Barbary pirates shaped the unfavorable impressions Americans had of Islamic North Africa. I will then point out various examples from the *Pennsylvania Gazette* about how these unfavorable impressions can be traced in one of America’s major newspapers, and conclude the essay by showing how these ideas connect to America’s foreign wartime policy towards Tripoli and Algiers.

Frank Lambert points out that Americans tried to make sense of North Africa by exploring the differences between the United State and the Barbary Pirates. In the

⁹⁸ Pratt, 4-5.

captivity narratives, American ideals were often pitted against the stereotypical views of the people of the Barbary Coast: lawless versus lawful, free trade versus the tribute system, freedom versus tyranny, Protestantism versus Islam. The narratives “singled out the most despicable pirate behavior and compared it with the loftiest American ideals... the United States was locked in a struggle of liberty versus tyranny and good versus evil.”⁹⁹ Therefore, the same types of ideas and language crop up in nearly all of the captivity narratives.

One of the first pervading myths that can be found over and over again in the captivity narratives is that all non-European or non-Americans are “barbaric”, and that all “Barbarians” are the same. Take, for example, an excerpt from John Foss, the sailor whose account this essay opened with:

The turks are a well built robust people, their complexion not unlike Americans, tho’ somewhat larger, but their dress, and long beards, make them appear more like monsters than human beings.¹⁰⁰

Foss was captured off the coast of Algiers. Undoubtedly, there were some ethnically Turkish people of the Ottoman Empire present, but Foss referred to everyone in the area as if they were Turkish, indicating that he could not tell apart the various peoples residing in Algiers. From the extract, it is also apparent that his criteria for what qualifies as a “human being” is decidedly Anglo-centric, and those that do not conform are portrayed as “monsters.” The dehumanization of the Algerians due to Orientalist ideas is strongly evident. Thomas Pellow’s earlier account from the 1730s is similar. He wrote: “The

⁹⁹ Lambert, 105-106

¹⁰⁰ Foss, 92.

enemy seemed to me as monstrous ravenous creatures, which made me cry out “Oh Master! I am afraid they will kill us and eat us!”¹⁰¹

Another indicator of American captives’ belief that non-Westerners were barbaric and all the same was the presence of constant derogatory comparisons between various North Africans and Native Americans. Dr. Cowdery, for example, wrote

Marriages are proclaimed in Tripoli, by one or two old women, who run through the streets, making a most hideous yelling, and frequently clapping their hands to their mouths, similar to the American Indians in their pow wows.¹⁰²

William Ray was onboard the same ship as Dr. Cowdery when captured by the Barbary pirates. He makes a similar disparaging comparison to a woman he encountered in his captivity:

In the morning, about eight o’clock, an old sorceress came to see us. She had the complexion of a squaw, bent with age, ugly by nature, and rendered frightfully by art.¹⁰³

The language implies not only that all non-Europeans are the same (that is, barbarous and uncivilized), but that Europeans/Americans are superior to the “savage.”

This rhetoric evokes the same types of derogatory language as that surrounding Indian Wars. America at this time was expanding Borders and commercial realms across the continent, and Christopher Castiglia in his analysis of Native American captivity narratives discovered that asserting the inferiority of Native American cultures suggested that Americans did not need to feel guilty for exterminating them.¹⁰⁴ Early Americans

¹⁰¹ Thomas Pellow as cited in Milton, 58.

¹⁰² Cowdery, 184.

¹⁰³ Ray, 190.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Castiglia. *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

developed a similar idea in these comparisons of the Barbary powers with the Native Americans; in denigrating them, they could justify the wars that Europe was unwilling to fight.

Another theme that most of the captivity narratives share is the portrayal of the Barbary pirates as capricious, childlike, and cruel. In Maria Martin's account, she describes the pirates as "barbarians" who "began their favorite work, cutting maming [sic] and literally butchering, all that they found on deck."¹⁰⁵ Take also the narrative of Dr. Cowdery who describes actions of the pirates:

After the flat of the Philadelphia was struck, and the officers and crew were awaiting the pleasure of their new masters, the Tripolitan chiefs collected their favourites, and, with drawn sabers, fell to cutting and slashing their own men, who were stripping the Americans and plundering the ship. The cut off the hands of some, and it is believed several were killed. After this battle amongst themselves was a little over, we were ordered into the boats to be carried on the shore.¹⁰⁶

William Ray, his crewmate denies Cowdery's accusations that there were amputations and deaths in the infighting that occurred among the Barbary corsairs when they were captured. He wrote

It is true there was a sort of mutiny and clashing of arms amongst them; but for my part I never saw any hands amputated, nor do I believe there were any lives lost.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Maria Martin. *History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, Who was Six Years a Slave in Algiers: Two of Which She Was Confined in a Dark and Dismal Dungeon, Loaded With Irons: To Which is Annexed a History of Algiers, a Description of the Country, the Manners and Customs of the Natives-Their Treatment to Their Slaves-Their Laws and Religion &c, &c.* (Boston: W. Crary, 1807) in Baepler, 149.

¹⁰⁶ Cowdery, 161.

¹⁰⁷ Ray, 188.

Dr. Cowdery made many such judgments about the Barbary pirates and the North Africans in Tripoli. Another excerpt of his journal, however, demonstrates that he was at the least as guilty as they of cruelty:

August 5. The American squadron anchored off Tripoli. I was ordered to dress the wound of a Mameluke, who had his hand shattered by a bursting of a blunderbuss. I amputated all his fingers but one, with a dull knife, and dressed them in a bungling manner, in hopes of losing my credit as a surgeon in this part of the country, for I expected to have my hands full of wounded Turks in consequence of the exploits of my brave countrymen.¹⁰⁸

A third common stereotype the slave narratives share is the assumption that Islam itself is antiquated, barbaric, backward, or somehow the reason for the Barbary pirates' plundering behaviors. William Ray appeared surprised at the kindness of the religious figures ("Mahometan saints of Anchorites,") who "offered me a piece of bread in the name of the prophet, pitied my situation, and really appeared to possess philanthropy."¹⁰⁹ This antagonism is also apparent in the narrative of Francis Brooks, an Englishman held captive in Morocco. The account was reprinted in Boston for the colonial American public. He wrote about his "confinement among those barbarous savages... whose Religion was composed of cruelty, whose customs were extravagant, and whose usages almost intolerable..."¹¹⁰

These quotes shed more light on the American views of Islam, and the corsairs, than on the religion itself. Frank Lambert points out that in America's struggle against the

¹⁰⁸ Cowdery, 171.

¹⁰⁹ Ray, 201.

¹¹⁰ Francis Brooks. *Barbarish Truth Being A True History of the [unintelligible] Condition of the [unintelligible] under the Tyranny of Ithmael Emperor of Morocco and King of Fez and [unintelligible] Barbary. In Which is Likewise Given a Particular Account of His Late Wars with the Algerines. The Manner of His Pirates Taking the Christians and Others. His Breach of Faith With Christian Princes. A Description of his Castles and Guards, and the Places Where He Keeps His Women, His Slaves and Negroes. With a Particular Relation of the Dangerous Escape of the Author, and Two English Men More From Thence, After a Miserable Slavery of Ten Years.* (Boston: S. Phillips, 1700), 6.

Barbary powers, they made a larger point to denounce religious and civil oppression. Islam became equated to Catholicism as tyrannical, and in opposition to the Protestant American values of freedom.¹¹¹ However, in the various treaties signed between the US and the North African powers, America makes no such references to Protestantism or God, while Morocco does define itself as an Islamic state through references to Allah.¹¹²

While there was an antagonism between Christianity and Islam centuries before and during the Crusades and again during the *Reconquista* when Muslims and Christians were in more direct competition¹¹³, by the late eighteenth century, “cynicism and greed had replaced religious enthusiasm” in the antagonism between the two religions.¹¹⁴ “One American captive concluded in the 1790s that money was the Algerine god, that the pirates were far more interested in taking prizes than in waging holy war.”¹¹⁵

Islam actually had very little to do with the Barbary pirates’ actions. As aforementioned, they plundered Christian ships not because of holy war (*jihad*), but because according to Koranic law, other Muslims could not be enslaved in this way. “The greater knowledge of Islam that is apparent in the Eighteenth Century ended in a strengthening of the most bigoted Christian stereotypes, accompanied by general ignorance and a refusal to understand.”¹¹⁶ The pointed aversion to all things Islamic within the captivity narratives contributed to the gradual dehumanization of the Barbary powers and their corsairs.

¹¹¹ Lambert, 112-120.

¹¹² *The Barbary Treaties*, The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/barbary/bar1786t.htm>, (accessed 10 May, 2008).

¹¹³ For more information about the Crusades and the *Reconquista*, see David Nicolle. *Fighting for the Faith: The Many Fronts of Medieval Crusade and Jihad, 1000-1500 AD*. (Barnsley, England: Pen & Sword Military, 2007), or Joseph O’Callaghan. *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

¹¹⁴ Earle, 3.

¹¹⁵ As cited in Lambert, 8.

¹¹⁶ Thompson, 31.

Fuad Sha'ban asserts that "America developed a definite Orientalist cultural attitude from its beginning..."¹¹⁷ As the American nation emerged, and the young republic was flooded with nationalism and ideals as Americans tried to define themselves as separate from Great Britain, the Barbary pirates encroached on the American periphery. The first tendency for Americans was to define the North Africans in direct opposition to how they defined themselves. Sha'ban also points out that the United States was also experiencing a religious revival, and that these two factors "were vital in shaping America's attitude to and treatment of the "others."¹¹⁸

IV Following the Orientalist Language in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*

The antagonistic language used to describe the Barbary pirates and regencies/kingdoms in the captivity narratives also surfaced in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. It is revealing that in the 1750s, with the Tripolitan and Algerine Wars fifty or more years away, the language concerning the Barbary pirates is predominately neutral, and the corsairs are mentioned with impartiality. The tone of the articles is that of imparting news, and little more. As the conflicts with the corsairs escalates, and more Americans become aware of the incidents between their kinsmen and the North African pirates, the language begins to mimic that of the slave narratives.

From 1750 to 1785, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* is filled with reports about the Barbary corsairs and their regencies. The Christmas edition of 1758, for example, mentions that the last letters from Barbary reported of two English vessels being taken by

¹¹⁷ Fuad Shaban. *Islam and Arabs in Early American Thought: The Roots of Orientalism in America*. (Durham: The Acorn Press, 1991), viii.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, ix.

the corsairs off the coast of Sale (Sallee). The current letter was written to inform the American colonies that

the Emperor... is greatly incensed at the taking these Vessels, and that he had sent an Alcayde, with a Party of Horse, to bring in Chains the two Captains of the Cruizers [sic] who took them; that he intended to write a Letter to Lord Hume... assuring him that these Captures were contrary to his Orders, and that he will chastise his Captains; for that he is perfectly inclined to keep Peace and Friendship with us.¹¹⁹

Another letter published in 1763 mentions the corsairs engaged in plunder. The language is also decidedly neutral:

Captain Shearman Clarke, arrived here last Week from Teneriffe, in 35 Days Passage, and advises, That the Trade there has been for some Time much infested by three Barbary Corsairs, viz. Two Chebecks and a Galley, who had made many Captures, and continued to take all Vessels they met with, that were not provided with a Mediterranean Pass.¹²⁰

In the mid 1780s, however, the letters and articles in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* begin to reflect the type of language found in the captivity narratives. The edition of 1786 marks the first time the sea-rovers off the coast of North Africa are referred to in the newspaper as “pirates” instead of corsairs. After 1786, the term “Barbary pirate” appears with regularity. This marks a change in the American perception of these men. Corsair implies a legal, state-sanctioned status, while pirate once again draws parallels between the cut-throat outlaws of the Caribbean who could be hung at will by sheer virtue of being a pirate. The shift in terminology reflected a very real shift in the way Americans viewed the pirates, from men that had to be treated honorably (privateers) to men that could be violently terminated (pirates).

Another comparison that paves the way for the justification of subjugating and dominating the Barbary powers was that between the Barbary corsairs and the Native

¹¹⁹ “Extract of a Letter from Gibraltar, Aug 16,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 25, 1758.

¹²⁰ “Newport, August 15,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 25, 1763.

Americans. There are several instances where the Barbary corsairs are compared to the “savages of the frontier”, implying that non-Europeans/Americans are all barbarous, and all similar, and all deserve the same bloody fate. An entry from March 22, 1786 reads:

...and rescue it from the predatory invasions of the Barbary states. The hostile conduct of the savages on our frontiers - the unexampled behaviour of our late enemy, in holding our posts contrary to the treaty, bridling the country, and depriving us of the advantages which would otherwise arise from it; and above all, that due and sacred regard which a nation ought ever to pay to her engagements...¹²¹

Another entry from 1794 makes a similar comparison: “Our savage enemies in the Western Territory, and on the coasts of Barbary, are evils of the most painful nature...”¹²²

An entry in the summer of 1800 contains an indirect comparison that nevertheless carries the same implications as the others:

Yet this, to the disgrace of our country, has been the case; we have been obliged to sacrifice treasure to purchase peace with the powers of Barbary, and to redeem our citizens there from slavery; we have been at great charge in sustaining a long and expensive Indian war, and in the protection of our frontiers; we have suffered immensely by the plunder of our commerce; we have fortified our ports and harbours; we have replenished our magazines; and we have created a very considerable navy.¹²³

Again, it becomes apparent that the Barbary pirates were perceived as the same type of impediment to American “progress” as the Native Americans. In reflecting the language of the captivity narratives, the articles in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* draw parallels between the Barbary corsairs and the pirates of the Caribbean as well as the Native Americans. This implies that the corsairs of the North African Mediterranean could be treated in the same way as actual pirates or as Native Americans, rather than being dealt with in a diplomatic manner. “In viewing the pirates as barbarians, Americans

¹²¹ “Philadelphia, March 22,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 22, 1786.

¹²² “No. 1 The Farmer’s and Improver’s Friend,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 9, 1794.

¹²³ Theodore Sedgwick, “Farewell Address of the Honorable Mr. Sedgwick,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 25, 1800.

evoked dark images from antiquity that they reserved for their worst enemies.”¹²⁴ The implications of this are sinister: In the American mind, the corsairs no longer belonged to states that could be diplomatically reasoned with, but to a menace to be exterminated in the name of American freedoms¹²⁵.

From here, I will explain America’s official response to the Barbary threat. I have demonstrated how the Orientalist language used originally in the captivity narratives was later used in at least one of the main colonial newspapers as the nation approached the possibility of war. Now, I will use samples of the policy makers’ language to show how the same Orientalist slurs and ideologies found in the captivity narratives and in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* were used by officials like Thomas Jefferson to justify the Tripolitan and Algerine Wars with the Barbary pirates.

V. Orientalism and the Barbary Wars

There are many recent books available that are more than sufficient at explaining the many political nuances leading up to the two Barbary Wars, as well as the military tactics and battles the United States fought in the waters surrounding Tripoli and Algiers.¹²⁶ Instead of repeating the information therein, I will briefly explain the conflicts so that I can establish a context for showing the connections between the captivity

¹²⁴ Lambert, 119.

¹²⁵ For more information regarding the ways in which Native Americans were perceived and treated by Americans while Americans were in conflict with the Barbary Pirates, see the collection of essays edited by Richmond Brown entitled *Coastal Encounters: Confrontations, Accommodations, and Transformations in the Eighteenth-Century Gulf South*. (University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

¹²⁶ For a good starting point, see books by Lambert, Leiner, Toll, Parker and London in the bibliography.

narratives, the language in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and the acceptance of the aggressive foreign policy towards North Africa.

As aforementioned, prior to the American Revolution American shipping had been protected by Britain. Britain had a long history of signing treaties with the various Barbary powers, and paying the tribute to ensure safety of its own commerce in the Mediterranean. Once the American colonies had gained their independence, the various Barbary powers began sanctioning their corsairs to attack ships flying the American flag, and demanding tribute in exchange for ceasing this behavior. For nearly thirty years, the young republic attempted to sign treaties, and collect the funds and presents requested by the regencies and Morocco to keep their shipping safe. Baepler explains that "...public opinion in the United States grew increasingly indignant, particularly after 1801 when Tripolitan corsairs seized several American ships. "Millions for defense- not one cent for tribute" became a popular slogan."¹²⁷

American outrage was, of course, only one of the reasons the United States went to war. My argument is that the American outrage (that can be witnessed in the language of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* as well as in the writings of the founding fathers) occurred because of the Orientalist stereotypes perpetuated by the captivity narratives. These stereotypes caused a demonization of the Barbary pirates and by extension, their regencies/kingdoms, and allowed American to think about North Africa in terms of domination, rather than further negotiation. This mindset in turn caused acceptance of the Barbary Wars.

"The Tripolitan War (1803-1805) marked the first prolonged engagement of the new U.S. Navy and demonstrated the nation's ability to exert its will across the

¹²⁷ Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters*, 155.

Atlantic.”¹²⁸ Lambert agrees: he understands the struggle between America and Barbary as a struggle for the fledgling country’s prominence in the Atlantic World. It “pitted two marginal players in the Atlantic World against each other as each sought to better its position vis-à-vis Europe’s maritime powers.”¹²⁹ The American captures and enslavements of the late eighteenth century exposed the United States as weak and disjointed ex-colonies of Britain. The outcome of the wars demonstrated the young nation’s viability and would earn it the recognition it craved on the international stage.

Although Thomas Jefferson had a republican reputation for noninterventionism and a preference for peace, he believed that a naval squadron in the Mediterranean would be sufficient to protect American shipping there, and “was probably cheaper than making payments and was at least a fixed cost.”¹³⁰ He thought it would be unfair to tax the nation for the benefit of the merchants, but eventually chose to build up the navy rather than continually paying tribute. At the beginning of the war, his message was clear: “Unlike tribute-paying Europeans, freedom-loving Americans would rid themselves of the piratical pestilence.”¹³¹

In his language, “Jefferson linked the plight of the captives to the economic imprisonment of the country.”¹³² He provided six reasons for going to war. Firstly, justice demanded that the captors of American citizens be punished. Secondly, America’s honor as a free nation required defense. Jefferson was also adamant that going to war would cost less than tribute and that war was at least “equally effectual” as negotiation in the short term, but with a higher long-term potential. Furthermore, going to war would

¹²⁸ Baepler, *White Slavery in Africa*, 111.

¹²⁹ Lambert, 200.

¹³⁰ Symonds, 28.

¹³¹ Lambert, 129.

¹³² Baepler, *White Slavery in Africa*, 52.

arm the federal government with “the instruments of coercion over its delinquent members,” and centralize the power in the federal government. In fighting Algiers, the United States would earn respect in Europe, which would give America advantage in future economic dealings with the current European superpowers¹³³. One might ask: would these objectives have seemed plausible in justifying war with a European nation?

John Adams, who was ardently opposed to warring with the Barbary powers nevertheless looked upon North Africa through Orientalist eyes, presuming that “If we could even send a force sufficient to burn a town¹³⁴, their unfeeling governors would only insult and deride.”¹³⁵ Thomas Jefferson’s reply to such ideas was that it would be humiliating to the United States to treat with “such enemies of the human race,”¹³⁶ as if the Barbary pirates or their regencies/kingdoms were not a part of that race.

These words express the Orientalist concepts of the captivity narratives. They imply that the rulers of the Barbary coast were cruel, even regarding their own citizens, and that they were subhuman. These ideas function as a justification for retribution and military action, and made Jefferson’s commerce and status-oriented reasons for declaring war more palatable to an American public that was used to the North Africans being depicted as backward savages from the very first encounters.

VI. Conclusion

¹³³ *Naval Documents Related to the United States War with the Barbary Powers*, Volume I. (Washington, D.C., 1939), 10.

¹³⁴ The United States frequently burned Native American settlements and tribal lands under a “scorched-earth policy” as part of the routine ways of dealing with Native American resistance to Anglo-American expansion, and I believe this is what John Adams is referring to here.

¹³⁵ John Adams to Thomas Jefferson in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With a Life of the Author*, ed. Charles Francis Adams. Vol 8 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), 218.

¹³⁶ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, *Ibid*, 218.

“By constructing North Africa as monstrous and by combating this so-called “barbarity,” Anglo-America and later the U.S. were able to portray their country as just and honorable.”¹³⁷ This type of dichotomy is precisely what the captivity narratives and the *Pennsylvania Gazette* created with their language. The principle of Orientalism and Orientalist language is that the other is constructed in opposition to the self. The way in which American viewed the Barbary powers, therefore, allowed the young republic to construct itself as a free and commerce-based nation. The idea of the American identity as superior to that of the Barbary States allowed for America to invoke principles in its proto-imperialistic war with North Africa. Although America did not go on to colonize North Africa, it did inherit the European mentality of imperial expansion, and the Barbary Wars were one of the early manifestations of this mindset.

Christopher Castiglia asserts that “captivity narratives were indeed circulated to justify imperial expansion,” and that the radical differences emphasized therein gave rise to imperialist hierarchies.¹³⁸ It is important not to underestimate the power of words on the early American psyche. “The horrid proceedings of these merciless barbarians,”¹³⁹ elicits a profoundly different set of assumptions and emotions than, for example, a more neutral phrase like “the actions of the North African privateers.” The captivity narratives titillated and enraged readers, and shaped their condescending views of North Africa. These views can be traced in the evolution of their mimicry in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and in the language used by the policy makers throughout the course of the Barbary

¹³⁷ Baepler, *White Slavery in Africa*, 67.

¹³⁸ Castiglia, 4.

¹³⁹ Thomas Nicholson. *An Affecting Narrative of the Captivity and Suffering of Thomas Nicholson [A Native of New Jersey] Who Has Been Six Year A Prisoner Among the Algerines, And From Whome He Fortunately Made His Escape A Few Months Previous To Commodore Decatur's Late Expedition. To White Is Added A Concise Description of Algiers Of the Customs, Manners &c of The Natives- and SomeParticulars of Commodore Decatur's Late Expedition, Against the Barbary Powers.* (Boston: G. Walker, 1816), 9.

conflicts. This, in turn helps to explain why the revolutionary American foreign policy

did not face tremendous opposition from the public. The policies were so aggressive in part because of the power of the orientalist tropes about the Barbary pirates perpetuated by European and American captives.

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White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 73. If, as Marwan Obeidat claims, "the Barbary pirates" affair sums up what Americans knew of the Muslim World until the 1970s, then understanding what it was that the Americans thought they knew of the Muslim World becomes of utmost importance. Barbary pirates, the purpose is to understand how misguided stereotypes of the past. influenced early America's aggressive foreign policy towards the Barbary powers. I will take a moment here to explain the terms that crop up repeatedly in this essay. "Barbary" was the accepted British and American all-purpose term used for the entirety. of the North African region, excluding Egypt.