

Taste, Manners, and Miscegenation: French Racial Politics in the US

Robert Fanuzzi

A prequel:

A French gourmand, in flight from political turmoil at home, arrives in post-Revolutionary America with a taste for satire, a Rabelaisian eye for folly, and a gargantuan appetite for turkey. Journeying from the Francophone enclave of Philadelphia to the “backwoods” of Hartford, he enjoys the hospitality of a Mr. Bulow, “a worthy old American farmer,” and his “four buxom daughters, for whom our arrival was a great event” (Brillat-Savarin 77). Having charmed his hosts, he enjoys still more success as a member of their shooting party, bagging the prize turkey for “sport.” Afterwards, the gourmand makes sport of one of the most widely noted mannerisms of Americans, the childlike but grating chauvinism for their nation that stops every conversation in its tracks. True to form, his American host foregoes the customary bon voyage wishes in order to drill into his departing guest the national creation myth. His own well-tended estate, he reminds his French visitor, pays eloquent tribute to the providential system of mild laws and low taxes that has rewarded the labor of self-sufficient yeomen like him. He means to leave his listener with the thrilling prospect of continual, self-perpetuating prosperity, but all the gourmand has heard is a steady droning in his ear. “I was thinking,” he recalls as he rode away, “of how I would cook my turkey” (81).

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In *The Physiology of Taste* (1825), an eccentric philosophical treatise on cookery, cuisine, and conviviality, Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin made quick work of the Americanist commentary that so many of his fellow travelers inscribed into their narratives of North American travel. The most well known of these French travel writers, Jean de Crevecoeur and Alexis de Tocqueville, used their narratives to generate the synthetic, formalized images of democracy—the pervasive equality of condition; the assimilation of foreign emigrants; the vitality of civil society—that contemporaries like Mr. Bulow and subsequent generations of American citizens employed to express their sense of national belonging.¹ *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840) have equally proved useful to a pre- and post-war generation of Americanist scholars, providing them with the distinctive historiography, sociology, and political theory of a national liberal tradition. In this capacity, the Franco-American travel narrative has served not just as a privileged Americanist archive but as a virtual starting point for the self-conception of the field of American studies.²

And yet, the French commentator who could climax the saga of the venerable American farmer with the thought of his next meal and comically invert the priorities of citizenship with the appeal of roasted turkey can better reveal the incongruous, even adverse interest of his fellow travelers in the articulation of American democracy. Brillat-Savarin's entertaining little anecdote in fact tells an allegory about the pleasures of taste that underwrote not just the critical method and vocabulary of the travelogue genre but the counter-democratic liberal politics which gave two generations of French travel writers their vocation and stake in the US. The comic encounter of the gourmand and the citizen is thus a good place to begin a literary-historical inquiry that would reverse the nationalist appropriation of the Franco-American travel narrative, reinstate its foreignness, and retrieve its Americanist discourse from the self-representation of the American citizen.

In Brillat-Savarin's rendition of this allegory, the exhibition of taste operates as a fundamentally incongruous moment within a civic ritual of self-fashioning, a differend within a rapidly foreclosing liberal consensus, and—perhaps most importantly—an expression of cultural estrangement that is meant to resonate beyond the misalliance of citizen and gourmand and indicate a still more fatal incommensurability. A broader survey of the travel narrative genre indeed suggests that Brillat-Savarin's was the exception that proved the rule, and that many other French travel writers took the logical next step of counterpoising their

own ironic detachment from the American citizen, the ideological and structural condition for the experience of aesthetic pleasure, with the exclusion of Native Americans and African Americans from civic life. The comic allegory of taste doubled as an historical account of conquest and enslavement and interpolated the reality of social incongruity into the concept of a national people.

As a result, the Franco-American travel narrative categorized the oppression of non-white races in the US as a subject for pleasure and the occasion for the elaboration of an aesthetic subjectivity rather than as a subject for politics. This held true even when the French antislavery movement adopted the American travelogue as its chosen medium and official literature. In both its pre- and postrevolutionary phases, this movement sent a peripatetic group of abolitionists to the US in search of the full range of New World pleasures—gastronomic, social, and heterosexual (the farmer’s “four buxom daughters”)—while advancing France’s historic interest in the abolition of American slavery. Taste was the positive statement of their political commitment, their gesture of solidarity with minority races of the US, not just the signifier of aesthetic detachment from the calling of American citizenship.

How did France’s tactical response to the epochal problem of American slavery become intertwined with aesthetic technologies for seemingly idle gratification? A large part of the credit, or blame, should go to the North American travel narrative. As Mary Louise Pratt has argued, the popularized New World travelogues of eighteenth-century England brokered the emergence of an aesthetically mediated antislavery sensibility that reproduced both the white male subjectivity of the narrator and its aesthetically coded desires (86–107). The importance of the travel narrative to France’s American antislavery initiative . . . invites us to look beyond a subject-centered critique of the genre to consider its socially constructive role in the formation of liberal constituencies and political objectives. As Harry Liebersohn has shown, Paris’s prerevolutionary reform culture sought to efface conflicts between the landed and the commercial classes and to gain leverage for the liberal aristocracy over incipient political change by devoting a venerable literary genre to the cause and condition of France’s erstwhile allies, the conquered natives of North America (2–17). Francois Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, whom the English abolitionist Thomas Clarkson deemed the natural leader of a French antislavery movement and who would later revive the initiative under the Bourbon restoration, perpetuated this liberal enterprise from his court-in-exile in Francophone Philadelphia. During the Jacobin interregnum, he maintained his liberal credentials by publishing

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the multivolume *Travels through the United States of North America and the Country of the Iroquois* (1799).

Rochefoucauld's precedent suggests that the politics and principles of a Franco-American antislavery initiative would originate in the dual realms of salon and frontier, not in the public sphere of liberal democratic social formations.³ That may well be one reason why so many scholarly inquiries into Anglo-American abolitionist politics, including my own, take the printed articles of this public sphere—newspapers, pamphlets, and petitions—as their point of departure, while travel narratives are often neglected as antislavery literature. It also suggests that an antislavery initiative that would emerge from the tradition of North American travel narratives would dispense with the premise of democratic equality built into modern print culture and incorporate the ethnographic representation of cultural differences—manners, in the parlance of the genre—into its political objectives. The argument about race to emerge from this marriage might well be called counter-democratic for employing an inherently discriminatory discourse of taste and manners to elaborate these differences. And yet, the movement that could insinuate a wide range of aesthetic modalities—including gourmandism, courtliness, and heterosexual desire—into its account of American race relations would prove more able than its Anglo-American counterpart to recognize the significance of interracial contact for the antislavery cause and exploit the potential of what Pratt calls “trans-culturation” (6).

In the larger tradition of New World literature from which the Franco-American travel narrative descended, an aesthetic but no less materialist discourse of taste furnished a veritable stage for interracial relations that was centered on the customs of the table. For the many authors and redactors of these travelogues, the cookery, cuisine, and hospitality of native peoples were self-evident examples of what Rochefoucauld would call “savage manners” (v), the oxymoronic term that brought an aristocratic ideal of refinement to bear on the ethnographic standard of otherness and which also imposed a courtly tradition of heterosocial conduct on emerging standards of bourgeois decency.⁴ By the eighteenth century, the traveler who could demonstrate a detailed familiarity with these manners was in the position to articulate a liberal discourse of cultural relativism that assumed both the universality of aesthetic pleasure among white and non-white races and the special role of taste in adjudicating interracial relations.⁵ Benjamin Franklin trod lightly over this ground in “Remarks Concerning the Savages of North America” (1784), but France's liberal constituencies had more at stake in such aesthetic assessments and made taste their signal political attribute, indicative of

both an expansive knowledge of the world and an enlightened, humane attitude toward the victims of colonialism.

Given this history, the French antislavery movement could be said to be just waiting for the man of taste who would travel the world in the name of enslaved Africans. It found its champion in Jacques Brissot de Warville, *philosophe sans portfolio* and petit-bourgeois son of a restaurateur who regarded the task of organizing a French antislavery movement as the occasion for American travel. Arriving on the cusp of revolution in 1788, Brissot came to the US as the official representative of *Les Amis des Noir*, the antislavery society he founded in imitation of Thomas Clarkson's London Abolition Society and Anthony Benezet's Pennsylvania Abolition Society. He also traveled unofficially as a gourmand who would bring a disarming interest in food and conviviality to the most pivotal geopolitical considerations. In his travelogue, *New Travels in the United States* (1797), and later in the policies he pursued as a leader of revolutionary France, Brissot consistently looked for solutions to the American slavery problem within the discursive and material space of the table, the socially symbolic sphere of aesthetic pleasure that staked France's claim not just to the ideal of civilization but to the postcolonial destiny of the Americas.

The travel narrative of Gustave de Beaumont, a second-generation abolitionist, shows how crucial this claim was to France's the American antislavery initiative of France. Beaumont traveled to the US in 1831 as Tocqueville's traveling companion and erstwhile collaborator who deviated from the writing of *Democracy in America* to write *Marie, or Slavery in the United States* (1835), the first novel about American slavery. In *Marie*, he cast his narrator stand-in as a man of taste and polite manners who was as estranged from the civic rituals of Jacksonian America as Tocqueville was immersed.

And yet, Beaumont created what Doris Sommer would call a "foundational fiction" for the French abolition movement and a cultural legacy for the US when he made that estrangement contingent on a secret, attenuated, and ultimately tragic bond with an American woman of "Creole background," among the first of American literature's tragic mulattoes. Beaumont, I will argue here, used the travel narrative's discourse of aesthetic pleasure to recuperate and redeploy France's colonial legacy of *metisage*, or miscegenation, as an antebellum antislavery argument.⁶ In *Marie*, he would use that legacy to drive a wedge between popular institutions of democracy and the politics of race relations; he wanted to end the jurisdiction of democracy over the problem of racial justice altogether. He made a retroactive case for French suzerainty

over the racial politics of North America by adumbrating an aesthetic sphere of sociability to which African Americans, Native Americans, women, and, of course, foreigners were especially entitled but from which American citizens could gain no pleasure.

1. *Liberte, Egalite, Canapes*

By the time Brissot founded *Les Amis* in 1788, an Anglo-American antislavery collaboration had already created a broad consensus on the inhumanity of the African slave trade by facilitating the trans-Atlantic exchange of correspondence, treatises, and popular pamphlets. The architects of this publicity campaign, Clarkson in England and Benezet in the US, gained leverage for their cause by conducting this exchange not only within the agencies and commissions of their respective governments but also among the wider public sphere of mass readers. An informed reading public consequently became the ideological and tactical counterpart to an Anglo-American abolitionist vision of liberalized social relations.⁷

The French abolition movement, on the other hand, made its distinctive contribution to the eighteenth-century antislavery movement by deriving principles and priorities on the basis of its members' proclivities for travel. Often, abolitionists did the traveling themselves, although the most intellectually influential members of this movement were "armchair" travelers like Baron de Montesquieu and Abbe Guillaume Raynal, who converted previously published African and American travelogues into symbolic geographies of liberty and tyranny. Travel writers in turn were enlisted in the dispute over American slavery whether they belonged to an antislavery society or not. Crèvecoeur, for instance, was embraced by the liberal intelligentsia of *Les Amis*, his passport stamped, so to speak, with the imprint of his passing antislavery sentiments in *Letters to an American Farmer*. Contemporaries like MLE Moreau de St. Mery and Francois Jean de Chastelleux became partisans in this debate by way of their first-hand accounts of slaveholding societies in the US and the Caribbean. Tocqueville himself belonged to this literary-political tradition, marking his return from the US by drafting failed legislation for the gradual abolition of colonial slavery. His opposite number was the hero of the 1848 emancipation decree, Victor Schoelcher, who used his fact-finding missions in the US as the basis for the devastating legislative reports and antislavery propaganda that eventually forced Louis Napoleon's hand. From the mid-eighteenth century until the

abolition of slavery in the French West Indies in 1848, the cultural value of travel to the US and the politics of the French antislavery struggle just could not be separated.⁸

In retrospect, Brissot can be considered the perfect candidate to give the French abolition movement its Americanist object and itinerary. He rose to prominence in Paris's prerevolutionary political culture as an iconoclastic journalist and publicist who promoted the cause of the American Revolution as a boon to French liberty. An enthusiastic reader of Crèvecoeur and translator of John Adams, Brissot saw the progress of liberty in the establishment of trans-Atlantic journals and societies of letters, with the assistance of which "a Laplander transplanted to Paris or Madrid would be as much at home as though he were a Frenchman or a Spaniard, since he would realize that as a man of letters, he belongs to all countries" (qtd in Ellery 52).

For Brissot, *Les Amis* was the realization of this republic of letters, a cosmopolitan public sphere that heralded the reign of the Enlightenment. In 1788, he invited Clarkson to Paris, hoping to use the latter's successful propaganda campaign for leverage in negotiations with a recalcitrant French government. Not content with Clarkson's support, he drew a bead on the American foreign minister in Paris, Thomas Jefferson, soliciting him for membership in *Les Amis*. Jefferson, already well on his way to living the lie of American slavery, was still venerated by the members of Paris's Americanist circle for his Montesquieu-like commentary on the degrading effect of slavery on the manners and morals of the master in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781) (Slotkin 260–318). With Jefferson's intellectual imprimatur and the logistical support of Clarkson, Brissot saw the chance to assemble a proverbial "dream team" of antislavery intellectuals with headquarters in Philadelphia, London, and Paris.⁹

Although rebuffed by Jefferson, Brissot retained his image of *Les Amis* as the metropolitan center of a new cosmopolitan order, sustained in the trans-Atlantic exchange of letters and ideas. A new kind of triangle trade would flourish, he argued in his self-explanatory pamphlet, *An Oration upon the Necessity of Establishing a Society at Paris, a Society to Cooperate with those of America and London, toward the Abolition of the Trade and Slavery of the Negroes* (1788). In his "Oration," he looked beyond the practical advantages that such an organization might bring to the more utopian prospect of establishing, in microcosmic form, a "free society" governed by "universal reason" (142). Through the efforts of this society, even the revolutionary but socially reactionary US could belong to "the empire of reason, which unfolds itself

under the auspices of liberty,” and abandon its atavistic attachment to colonial slavery (142).

Having chartered *Les Amis* in the image of a progressive Enlightenment, Brissot promptly abandoned the task of building domestic support for abolition and departed for the US. Armed with letters of introduction to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, he traveled as the bearer and agent of a prospective abolitionist international. He had the good fortune to arrive in the midst of the so-called “Philadelphia experiment,” the happy result of the commonwealth’s 1780 abolition decree that saw a new generation of freemen migrating to a city already home to an enterprising and visible free African-American community.¹⁰ Already convinced of the egalitarian destiny of the US, he would turn his travel narrative, *New Travels in the United States*, into a narrative of the course of liberty.

Brissot, however, had not come to Philadelphia to bear witness to the attainment of racial equality or even to see a viable black community. As the representative of an enlightened cosmopolitanism, he was there to see the new world order that anti-slavery philanthropy was building, brick by brick, in the US. His travel narrative thus confined its view of Philadelphia’s African Americans to the institutions that Quakers had built for them—the integrated hospital and free school that had won Benezet and his co-religionists international renown. Exulting in the sight of a peacefully employed black woman in this hospital, Brissot claimed to see the result of fair treatment, education, and opportunity on otherwise “unhappy negroes.” “There is a country,” he crowed, “where the Negroes are allowed to have souls” (143).

With his tour of Philadelphia, Brissot articulated a central tenet of the gradual abolition position shared by his tour guide Benjamin Rush: that only a structural, institutional program of philanthropy could reverse the damaging “environmental” effects of slavery on the African character and render black Americans capable of living in a free society.¹¹ As a result, *New Travels* closely intertwined Brissot’s antislavery arguments about the prospective elevation of the African race with his commendation of the city’s metropolitan institutions of education and cultivation. Philadelphia remained the focus of his abolitionist vision for the same reason: as the city where one finds “more men of information, more political and literary knowledge, and more learned societies” than anywhere else in North America, it was not just the paragon of civilization in the New World but the concrete symbol of what *black people* could become in the US (174).¹²

Brissot was similarly impressed by the success of the manumission society of New York City, which had brought its first

gradual abolition measure before the state legislature in 1785, but for the opposite reason. Here was a society of reformer elites bent on uplifting the moral character of *white people* and educating them as to their duties as properly liberal capitalist property holders. The growth of similar “holy institutions” up and down the eastern seaboard that Brissot chronicled in *New Travels* thus foretold not just the emancipation of the African race but the conversion of a recalcitrant white citizenry to democratic principles and, ultimately, the full realization of its revolution.

For this same reason, nothing was more thrilling to Brissot than the establishment of a manumission society in Virginia, ground zero of the slaveholding republic and power base of the nation’s ruling class. In an “appendix” to *New Travels* written in the midst of his service to the French Revolution, he claimed to see in this occurrence a “truth which formerly would have been stifled in Bastille: *God has created men of all nations, of all languages, of all colors, equally free: Slavery . . . is a violation of the Divine laws, and a degradation of human nature*” (164). Such was the stake of a French revolutionary in the manumission of African-American slaves: it made a thoroughly revolutionized US the guarantee and mandate for French liberty.

The same high stakes made Brissot eager to ignore several inconvenient facts: the American Revolution had not made the US a more free country; wartime nonimportation measures notwithstanding, there were actually 200,000 more slaves in North America in 1790 than in 1776; and slavery was actually tightening its grip in New York City after a brief hiatus during the British occupation.¹³ (He did, however, expertly draw out every loophole in Pennsylvania’s gradual emancipation law.) In *New Travels*, Brissot made the postrevolutionary US a literal topography of the principles that the French antislavery community embraced as the revolutionary causes of liberty. Referring to his own text, he might also have been talking about the nation it described when he promised his French readers, “You will see here to what degree the blessings of freedom can elevate the industry of man; how they dignify his nature; and dispose him to universal fraternity” (xii).

Clearly, Brissot had visited the US that existed in the imagination of French liberals and particularly in one of the seminal texts of the French Enlightenment, *Philosophical History of the Two Indies* (1770), by Abbe Raynal. With his collaboratively written New World history, Raynal, a key participant in Paris’s prerevolutionary salon culture and intellectual patron of *Les Amis*, essentially laid out an Americanist itinerary and object for the French antislavery movement. Over several volumes, it told a story of

colonial (read: Spanish) tyranny and anti-colonial liberation, with the American Revolution signaling a new history of freedom for both aggrieved colonists and, eventually, for the enslaved.¹⁴ The final edition, dedicated to the success of the American cause, helped to make the US a destination for the French abolitionist who would see the future before it arrived.

While in the US, Brissot clearly saw this future—or perhaps he was blinded by it. He shared the belief with a postrevolutionary generation of American liberals—people like Rush, John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and St. George Tucker—that the abolition of slavery was the nation’s revolutionary destiny, and that it belonged to the work of a revolution that was still unfolding.¹⁵ Of course, the political actors doing this work in the late 1780s were not the armed masses but the members of manumission societies, improvement societies, amelioration of slavery societies, literacy societies, and of course, Quaker abolition societies. For both the postrevolutionary American governing class and the prerevolutionary French liberal, the proponents of these philanthropic initiatives were doing the crucial work of securing the revolution and ensuring that a new generation of white citizens was ready to exercise the liberty they had gained by bloodshed. By this definition, the gradual abolition of slavery belonged to the work of revolution, although, as Winthrop Jordan notes, the avowedly revolutionary antislavery proposal authored by Tucker argued that the best preparation for liberty that African Americans could undertake was in fact the colonization of a foreign land (542–560).

Writing as an interested participant in France’s own democratic transformation, Brissot joined the liberal consensus that saw the work of America’s revolution most clearly unfold in the gradual abolition of slavery. Starting with the premise “that Americans, more than any other people, are convinced that all men are born free and equal,” he proceeded to chronicle “three distinct epochs...in this business—the prohibition of importation of slaves—their manumission—and the provision made for their instruction” that together, continued their struggle for liberty. Having observed the success of this struggle on the battlefields, he had no doubt that the progress of antislavery was “general and irrevocable” (147).

And yet Brissot was not such a fatalist or optimist that he could stand back and watch this history proceed without human intervention. On the contrary, he considered the revolutionary cause to be so fragile and imperiled that he dedicated his antislavery errand to rescuing the new nation from backsliding into political vassalage and neo-colonial economic dependency. Great Britain, he believed, was there waiting, taking advantage of the

financial liabilities of the new republic and poised to regain what it had lost on the battlefield by laying siege to America with—English port. And not just port, but ale, beef, and cheese—all the foodstuffs, imported and domestic, that made American democracy a mere simulacrum of English society in its tastes and manners and kept an independent nation culturally and economically tethered to its colonial master. Brissot was actually a pessimist and an activist when it came to what mattered most to him, and apparently what mattered most was not the gradual abolition of slavery. He devoted his most thorough policy proposals and personal advocacy to the state of American cuisine—the true bellwether, he believed, of the international revolutionary cause.

In retrospect, we should not be surprised. The same commentator who could see the cosmic implication of a racially integrated hospital made sure to note the price of mutton and produce in Philadelphia's wholesale markets. A travel writer's attention to quotidian detail was equally useful for interjecting the fact that Quakers drank wine with dinner into an apologia for their pacifism during the revolution. The episodic structure and random coverage of *New Travels*, in other words, was not isomorphic with the grand narrative of liberty that an abolitionist might write but instead redolent of the irreverent, disjunctive interests which demarcated the subjectivity of the gourmand.

Particularly in his account of New York City, Brissot seemed to abandon his antislavery narrative altogether and adopt the aesthetic persona that his contemporary Brillat-Savarin so expertly inhabited. Domestic port and cheese, he noted with approval, were nearly equal in quality to the imported varieties. With an equally discriminating eye, he appraised the value of American beef (excellent, like the English), the quality of French wines (a virtual libel against the name), and the paucity of coffeehouses (a crime all around); tea, he concluded, "forms the basis of the principle parties of pleasure" (57–58). Both the democratic society of the US and his own antislavery errand were known to him through the tastes and manners of the table.

In his capacity as a gourmand, Brissot could venture an answer to the most pressing sociological questions, such as why New Yorkers like to eat out so much. Women's preference for the "most brilliant silks," he argued, amounted to such an "expense" that it repelled many suitors from matrimony and created a "dangerous class" of bachelors who "take their revenge in the luxury of the table" (87). For Brissot, New York, the beneficiary of a local cornucopia of fish and game, well-established agricultural markets and distribution centers, competition between an endless number of taverns, and the expertise of the internationally

renowned chef Samuel Fraunces, was the moral equivalent of Addison's and Steele's London: a metropolitan whirl of new wealth and heedless consumption, with gluttony a vice akin to rakishness.¹⁶ He employed a moral vocabulary that drew at once from French culinary prejudices and from Jeffersonian republicanism when he called New York "the town on the continent of North America where English luxury displays its follies" (87).¹⁷

And yet was Brissot displaying his own follies when he seemed to abandon his vocation as international abolitionist emissary to retail the shortcomings of American food and fashion? As David Brion Davis had pointed out, Brissot's American antislavery mission was either supplemented or compromised by at least three other missions: one undertaken on behalf of prospective French investors in American debt, another in service to mercantile promoters of increased Gallo-American trade, and a third dedicated to the purchase of a country estate where he might enjoy a Crevecoeur-like retirement (*The Problem . . . Age of Revolution* 96 n.15).¹⁸ Together, these missions constitute a mixed bag of motives appropriate to the picaro or irreverent gourmand but no less suited to the abolitionist who foresaw the gradual abolition of slavery in the emergence of a new trans-Atlantic economic and political order. For Brissot, the liberating effect of the American Revolution on the French state and the reciprocal effect of French liberty on the slaveholding societies of the US depended on the very considerations that seemed to make his travel narrative irrelevant or frivolous: the choice of tea at "parties of pleasure"; the dearth of good French Bordeaux; and the fine quality of domestic cheese. He was absolutely convinced that a neo-colonial regime, flourishing in the very capital of the US, was corrupting the "republican simplicity of manners, and the pure pleasure resulting from it" with imported English luxuries and threatening the survival of the revolutionary cause (85). And so in the name of both republicanism and gourmandism, he proposed a new Franco-American revolutionary alliance anchored in the pleasures of the French table.

Of course, no one would have been surprised to learn that New York, only five years removed from its British occupation, was still an English city in its taste and manners, with taverns providing both the occasion and the venue for the city's outsized public celebrations (Bayles 332–377). By the early 1790s, the arrival of aristocratic expatriates from France and St. Domingue would combine with working class support for the French Revolution to transform the city's gastronomy and introduce New Yorkers to French staples like roasted fowl and tossed salad. In this politically charged atmosphere of "Gallomania," a market

for imported foodstuffs such as raisins and almonds flourished alongside a fad for French liberty; eventually, the venerable English institution of the tavern succumbed and took the French appellation of restaurant.¹⁹ Brissot, however, returned to France too early to profit from this cultural phenomenon or from local enthusiasm for the French Revolution. He was proposing a new Franco-American gastronomy as the agent and harbinger of revolution, so he abruptly ended his American journey to join one.

Before the fall of the Bastille redirected this journey, Brissot was actually following the path for a progressive, bilateral revolution laid out by his self-appointed mentor and imagined counterpart Jefferson. As foreign minister to France, Jefferson had sought to end the control of mercantilist, pro-British trade policies over trans-Atlantic commerce by opening French markets to American produce and abolishing the notorious *exclusif*, the imperial trade policy that bound the markets of colonies and nations. Jefferson had sought this change of policy for the benefit of Virginia's slave-holding agrarian producers but for French liberals like Brissot, a Franco-American commercial alliance that would neutralize Great Britain's economic and military advantage in the hemisphere was nothing less than a millennial event that signaled the end of colonial exploitation, the advent of free trade, and the abolition of the mercantilist slave trade. In the historical moment of the late 1780s, the fate of liberty rested on negotiated free-trade agreements that would institutionalize, or globalize, the American struggle against Great Britain.²⁰

For this enterprise, the comically irrelevant gourmand was actually quite relevant; clearly, there was a place for the enjoyment of taste in this new cosmopolitan economic order. In *New Travels*, Brissot tiptoed gently into Jeffersonian free-trade policy, innocently wondering why Frenchmen could not enjoy American-made maple sugar and why Americans could not afford good Bordeaux wines. Price subsidies and tariffs, he answered, fed them a meager diet of colonial commodities like St. Domingue sugar and West Indian rum. "Is this not an invitation to governments to remove barriers which are so easily broken over?" he asked rhetorically (170).

In the trade prospectus that he wrote as a companion volume to his travel narrative, *The Commerce of America with Europe, Particularly with France* (1795), Brissot went much further in developing a global political economy that would remove all barriers to gastronomic pleasure. The prospectus recommended the increased export of Virginia tobacco to France, deemed indispensable for the conviviality of Parisian cafes, and the increased consumption of French olives and brandies by Americans, who

unfortunately enjoy their “enthusiasm for liberty” with the “passions of a hermit” (50). Fortunately, a force that Brissot considered comparable with democratic self-interest—“that activity which perpetually disposes man to add to his enjoyment”—guaranteed that Americans would soon know the enthusiasms and passions of social beings as well as the culinary benefits of trade with France (50). Of course, he had to assure the devotees of Crèvecoeur’s arcadian vision that this new generation of citizen-gourmands would not lose their republican virtue or surrender their national character. The “habit” of an “austere [Protestant] religion” and the setting of “rural or marine [sic] life” will “keep [Americans] from ostentation and voluptuousness” that could otherwise turn them into ersatz Englishmen, or worse yet, New Yorkers (49–50). American citizens, it seemed, needed French food just as much as French subjects needed American liberty.

Writing as both agent and probable beneficiary of this gastronomic-political exchange, Brissot clearly sought to recalculate both the cultural value of French cuisine and the ideological value of taste for the benefit of the American revolutionary cause. In a postrevolutionary capitalist global economy, French food served not as the signifier of court or class but as the literal currency of freedom in the Atlantic world, the material counterpart to American principles of liberty. As such, it was far better suited to the native habitat, or *terroir*, of republicanism than English puddings and pies. (Who else but Jefferson could have introduced Americans to *pomme frites*? Freedom, it turns out, really did mean fries.) The same economy would liberalize, or capitalize, the pleasures of taste so that they no longer denoted subjective refinement but circulated throughout the world as the signature commodities of mutually beneficial, reciprocal free trade. For Brissot, the cause of liberty required a new set of economic and political international relations that would not just export the pleasures of the table but attempt to imitate them.

2. Sweet Commerce

With the fall of the Bastille, Brissot transformed his gastronomic vision into policy priorities that would direct the power of the revolutionary French state toward the same end. Upon his return to France, he assumed leadership of the Girondiste party, a revolutionary faction that would leverage Jeffersonian international free trade policies to gain influence for the mercantile and commercial classes internally. His first act as leader of the short-lived Gironde government was to attempt to secure the prize colony of

St. Domingue from internal unrest and foreign invasion by extending French citizenship to the property-holding mulattoes of St. Domingue. "The cause of the people of color," he declared famously, "is then the cause of the patriots of the old Third Estate and finally of the people so long oppressed" (qtd in James 116).

If James is right, and the fate of colonial slavery was connected to the French Revolution, then Brissot had seen the future of the revolution in the cause of mulatto citizenship. Since the earliest phases of the revolution, the members of *Les Amis* and supporters such as Lafayette and Mirabeau had made sure that the struggle of St. Domingue's *les gens de couleur*, or propertied mulattoes, against the *petit blancs*, Creole and French-born colonists, was recognized as a civil rights priority for French citizens, as a harbinger of their own liberation from a monopolist, corrupt monarchy. Often ignored, outflanked, and physically intimidated by colonial mercantile interests that controlled the government, anti-slavery advocates intertwined their agenda into almost every articulation of revolutionary objectives, from the calling of the Estates General to the Tennis Court Oath, finally finding a political home and power base in arguably the most commercial of the revolutionary regimes, the Girondiste republic.²¹

Like his fellow abolitionists, Brissot regarded mulatto citizenship not just as a counterbalance to the threatened anarchy of slave insurrection but as the start of France's liberal, enlightened custody of its most valuable colony. Of course, these were conservative, potentially counter-revolutionary objectives that helped to alienate the leadership and loyalties of the enslaved and to embolden the Jacobins, the more politically radical advocates of immediate emancipation who would rise to power and overthrow the Girondiste government with the promise to abolish the last vestige of France's class system, "the aristocracy of the skin" (qtd in James 120). However, they were also objectives that can be traced to Brissot's American travel narrative and particularly to his interest in the American Revolution. In *The Commerce of America with Europe*, Brissot had made clear the instrumentality of commodities of the French table like olives and brandy in the liberation of the Atlantic world. Their value as articles of free trade, however, directly reflected their socially symbolic value as tokens of conviviality and spontaneously occurring concord, so he was making an ideological argument as well. For Brissot, a Franco-American commerce entailed an aestheticized concept of social relations that was supposed to stand in for and supplant a colonial model of international relations. The outcome of his proposal was a declaration of rights that committed the cause of revolution not just to a liberalized imperial system but to the social utility of manners.

In the other half of his Americanist text, *New Travels in the United States*, Brissot foretold this commitment in arguing for the cultural influence of France on the US. “French politeness and delicacy of manners,” he hoped, might temper the austerity of republican virtue among Americans and render the society of men and women more “amiable” (52). Here was a rationale for Brissot’s interest in the US “parties of pleasure” that went beyond the economic and political value of their refreshments: French food, unlike English, sustained a kind of mutual enjoyment that elaborated the pleasures of the table in a gendered language of social relations. As Norbert Elias has told us, the table in fact emerged historically and ideologically as a space of aesthetic pleasure through a “civilizing process” that formalized rules for heterosocial contact (135–185). The policies that Brissot formulated as steward of the American Revolution, leader of the French revolutionary state, and, perhaps most importantly, as gourmand thus specifically addressed the state of gender relations in the US.

The lasting influence of Brissot’s revolutionary policy is evident in Beaumont’s *Marie*, which feminizes the cause of the mulattoes and sexualizes interracial relations to accommodate a postrevolutionary American romance.²² Brissot, however, can be said to already have cast France’s colonial racial politics in this literary form by adopting a normative discourse of heterosocial manners for the methodology of his American travelogue. He dedicated *New Travels* to documenting the superior morals of the new nation—“*have morals!*” he insisted, and, like American citizens, French subjects will “augment the ease of individuals, industry, agriculture, and everything which contributes to general prosperity” (xiii)—but what he actually recorded was what Montesquieu, in his own imaginary tour of the world, had called manners: the particularistic basis of a universalist epistemology that underwrote the intrinsic connection between locale and government. For both Montesquieu and Brissot, the study of manners was not just a neutral method or a sociological means to a political end but an object so encompassing that it could crowd out a static or homogenous representation of the social and bring to life an agglomeration of infinitely discrete behaviors and preferences: punch, before and after dinner; tea, not coffee, at “parties of pleasure”; silk in New York and chintz in Boston.

In *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), Montesquieu was not afraid to follow through on the ideological implications of this social representation so that these behaviors and preferences specifically entailed differences between the genders. His famous condemnation of slavery—“by having an unlimited authority over his slaves [the master] insensibly accustoms himself to the want of

all moral virtues” (235)—derived its authority, its vocabulary, and perhaps most importantly, its glancing reference to miscegenation by virtue of appearing in the midst of a larger discussion concerning the relative state of women under various regimes, the symmetry of sexual pleasure being an index of civilization for Montesquieu. As Hirschman has observed, Montesquieu’s methodology of manners generated a progressive theory of civilization that made *doux commerce*, or refined heterosocial manners, the basis for civil society, the nation-state, and ultimately, for the enlightenment and advancement that free international commerce was supposed to produce (59–63). The travel writer who lay claim to Montesquieu’s universalist epistemology as the basis for his own knowledge of the world and his particularistic methodology as the mandate for his interest in fashion in this sense was internalizing a heterosexist subject position that regarded every variety of heterosocial contact as invariably sweet.

As self-appointed agent for a Franco-American commercial alliance, Brissot had a vested interest in sweetening the social relations of American citizens with the foodstuffs of France. However, as the representative of *Les Amis* and later as leader of the French state, he had an equal interest in transforming the gender relations of the US so that they could simulate this commerce. His narrative of Philadelphia Quakers notwithstanding, Brissot articulated a vision of progress in *New Travels* that was more generally concerned with the amelioration of decadent luxury and the softening of austere republicanism—matters of taste and manners that had direct bearing on the “amiable” relations of men and women. A Franco-American gastronomic exchange that would use the pleasures of taste to nullify a British-governed mercantilist system and pave the way for the end of colonialism thus would also use a courtly ideal of heterosocial manners to represent the benefits of free market relations. This was Brissot’s version of Montesquieu’s *doux commerce*: international relations that were aestheticized, gendered, and ultimately sexualized so as to guarantee the mutuality of pleasure.

Having dedicated his American antislavery mission to this vision, Brissot would formally embrace its implications for colonial relations when he became an advocate of mulatto rights. As many feminist scholars have noted, the colonial economy was notorious not only for the asymmetry of its benefits—pleasure for the metropolis, despair for all but a few in the colonies—but for its social system of unequal gender relations. Inevitably, Garraway has argued, both the colonial policies of social control and the moral response to the abuses of colonialism were routed through a discourse of heterosexual practices.²³

In making a courtly tradition of heterosocial morals his language of colonial reform, Brissot extended his Americanist project into a revolutionary declaration that would liberalize France's Caribbean empire and extend its revolution into the hemisphere. The interest which he and the Girondistes had in enfranchising St. Domingue's *les gens de couleur* in fact coincided directly with their interest in legitimizing existing relations of *metissage*, so that the male offspring of these colonial liaisons would enjoy both the property and civic rights accorded to the male offspring of every legalized, consensual heterosexual relation in France. Once miscegenation was purged of its association with colonial exploitation, it could become the most visible symbol of the new republic's enlightened, equitable trade policy toward the US: a bilateral commerce, based on an aestheticized ideal of courtly manners, yielding to both parties an equal benefit and pleasure.²⁴

Whether the social and legal arrangement of heterosexual relations within either colony or the nation could ever yield this symmetry was beside the point. What antislavery advocates promoted with their support for miscegenation was a liberal capitalist model of colonial relations that could guarantee each partner mutual enjoyment and economic benefit but could not recognize the labor, which is to say, the capital which paid for their pleasure. As a result, neither *Les Amis* nor the Girondistes could ever make the enslaved Africans of the Americas partners in this commerce. In *New Travels*, Brissot pointedly categorized them as "unhappy," and therefore not party to the pleasures of civil intercourse to which their mixed-race offspring were entitled. As commodified beings, their social and sexual intercourse with their masters could never generate anything but more capital.²⁵ And so when the Jacobins deposed the Girondistes and inaugurated their government with a more radical declaration of immediate emancipation, they sealed their proclamation with a symbolic gesture that trumped not just Brissot's most revolutionary policy but his most ardent fantasy of *doux commerce*: an affectionate embrace between a dark-skinned, elderly enslaved African woman from St. Domingue and the president of the National Assembly.

3. Making Love

When Tocqueville and Beaumont arrived in the US in 1831–1832 as representatives of France's prison magistracy, they did so as covert abolitionists in a country literally aflame with the fear of miscegenation. Two of the most infamous episodes of this violent

era—the arson attack on Philadelphia’s integrated Abolition Hall and the riot in New York’s entrepot of mixed-race relations, Five Points—occurred while the two emissaries of the French government toured the northeastern cities. They were witnesses to the emergence of William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist enterprise in Boston, infamous for its courtship of the African-American anti-colonization movement, and to the galvanizing effect of his newspaper, *The Liberator*, on free blacks in the North. Perhaps even more importantly, they were witness to the galvanizing effect of this trans-racial collaboration on an emerging anti-abolitionist white majority. Arthur Tappan, the great financial underwriter of American reform, had spurred one of the most destructive riots in the history of New York City merely by inviting his African-American friend and colleague, Reverend Peter Williams, to sit next to him in church one Sunday. The spontaneous gesture of integration fed longstanding charges of abolitionist “amalgamation” and gave life to the rumor that Tappan was married to a black woman (Burrows and Wallace 556–560).

As explosive as the slavery question had become in the US, Tocqueville and Beaumont had reasons of their own—i.e., reasons pertaining to the domestic situation in France—for closeting their abolitionist politics. With the disaster of St. Domingue still a burning memory and its remaining slaveholding colonies restored as symbols of imperial prestige and sources of economic might, the “bourgeois monarchy” of Louis Philippe was careful to curry favor with colonial and mercantile interests as a condition for promoting social reforms at home. Elite philanthropic organizations like the Society of Christian Morality and the Society of Good Works, of which Beaumont was a member, did their part by safely ferrying their bureaucratic reports on such moral scandals as gambling, lotteries, penal condition, the death penalty, and, yes, slavery to the appropriate government commissions. To make clear the counter-revolutionary nature of their antislavery initiative, the leaders of these societies invariably included huge indemnification payments to colonial planters and elaborate plans for governmental control of the newly freed black population in their proposals for gradual emancipation (Drescher, *Dilemmas* 101–159). Choosing penal reform as the safest and most popular liberal route, Tocqueville and Beaumont thus traveled to America in 1831 as casualties of a chastened antislavery movement whose support of *les gens de couleur* had proved disastrously wrong for France on the crucial matters of empire and colonialism.

In *Democracy in America*, a suitably circumspect Tocqueville seemed determined to refight Brissot’s antislavery cause so that an antislavery policy would maintain, not erase,

racial distinctions. Apothegms like, “The more or less distant but inevitable danger of a conflict between the whites and the blacks of the South of the Union is a nightmare constantly haunting the American imagination” were designed to settle the matter, if not for the US then certainly for postrevolutionary France and its precious remaining colonies (358). Although Tocqueville offered sympathy for the lower caste status of free African Americans and penetrating insights into the origins of color prejudice, his unsparing assessment of the incommensurability of the white and black races presaged his future career as architect of a French colonial order in Algeria—a unilateral civil apparatus, as reconstructed by Pitt, that could maintain the caste system and protect a white or mixed-race minority from newly liberated masses.

Beaumont, on the other hand, was openly nostalgic for the colonial vision of Brissot, discovering in the hybridity of French, Canadian, and Indian cultures in the former French territories of Upper Michigan and Quebec examples of the *doux commerce* once promised by an enlightened Franco-American commercial and cultural exchange but which the rise of democracy in the US expressly forbade. According to George Wilson Pierson, he was particularly moved by the state of *metis*, women of Indian and French descent whose physical attractiveness seemed to merit respect not just for the respective races but for the Girondistes’ discredited policy toward amalgamation (285–305). For Beaumont, a voyage to the US was an opportunity to reconstruct a French imperium that had not been defeated by the counter-revolutionary power of Great Britain or by the revolutionary forces of African slaves, that had not forsaken the liberal bourgeoisie’s program of colonial reform or the propertied mulatto class of the French Antilles and, most importantly, that had not succumbed to the fiction of an unbroken Anglo-Saxon descent. He reserved this erstwhile North America for its minority races—Indians, mulattoes, and of course, expatriate French travelers, all of whom are literally hounded by a color conscious citizenry from the Anglophone metropolitan centers on the east coast to the northwest border regions of Michigan and Quebec.

In honor of this vestigial New France, Beaumont begins his travel narrative in its southern redoubt, the city of New Orleans, and dedicates it to an anonymous *metis*, an elegant, light-complexioned mulatto woman whom he observes sitting in the “colored” section of a theater. In his preface to his novel, he invokes her plight as an illustration of the “customs” of the US, by which he evidently means both racial prejudice and heterosocial manners. Accordingly, he finds the most glaring example of American racial oppression in the cultural space of the theater. For

Beaumont, the theater is a literal staging ground for the formalized, aestheticized sociability that a French antislavery policy would cultivate among white and non-white races of the US. On this same stage, he outs himself as a heterosexual, acknowledging his commitment to the cause of the people of color with the same combination of voyeuristic interest and courtly disinterestedness that he extends toward the nameless mulatto woman in the audience. The revolutionary agenda of the eighteenth-century French antislavery movement thus will be preserved and transplanted from the French Antilles to the US by the nineteenth-century French travel writer who can turn the principles of *doux commerce* into a story of heterosexual subject formation.

In honor of the nameless mulatto woman in the theater, Beaumont names his travel narrative *Marie*, and turns it into the first novel about American slavery. In doing so, he fuses the political cause of *les gens de couleur* with the narcissistic politics of aesthetic desire. He cannot make his intentions more clear: “I will make you [Americans] respect her! Marie will hold first place among your women!” he declares, so that Americans will feel exactly the way he does (67). He ascribes this ambition to his romantic protagonist, a fellow liberal aristocratic émigré named Ludovic, but in the extensive nonfiction sections of the novel that betray its origins as a travelogue, Beaumont follows through on Montesquieu’s categorization of manners as that which concerns the situation of women and invests his Americanist commentary with a corresponding aesthetic interest and inflection. He dedicates the first chapter of his travelogue, transparently titled “American Women,” to praise for their forthright intelligence and self-sufficiency, although he does reserve special distinction for the “girls of Baltimore” on account of their “renowned” beauty (16). He does venture something resembling a political commentary when he compares the education of American and French women, but he recovers himself just in time to state the implications of the subject for heterosocial pleasure. The well-educated American woman “ceases to be free on the day when [she marries],” he writes, while in France “she becomes so.” With marriage, a French woman “gains the right to join the outside world . . . [and] begins the life of parties, pleasures, and conquests”; her American counterpart “retires from worldly pleasures to live among the austere duties of the domestic hearth,” an “inviolable shrine which no breath of impurity must besmirch” (20).

In discussing the modulations of women’s sexual freedom in the US, Beaumont took care to phrase this potentially explosive commentary with the economy, wit, and discretion that would qualify it not just for the conventions of polite discourse but for

the refined banter of the table. He seems to revel in the fact that both the subject and the implied social setting for this commentary make it completely inapplicable to democratic society. “The American man,” he declares, “has neither the time nor the temperament for tender sentiments or gallantry; he is gallant once in his life, when he wishes to marry” (20). And so in order to indicate both the foreignness and the incongruity of an aesthetic perspective, he renders his final judgment on the state of American manners with an aphorism that would bring delight to any social gathering that did not include the American man. “Perhaps they love in America,” he concludes, “but they do not make love there” (22).

Beaumont appropriately begins the love story of *Marie* at the table, the symbolic sphere of heterosocial pleasure, but in the longer tradition of Franco-American travel narratives also the site of the comically incongruous encounter between the French visitor and the model American. Indeed, Ludovic’s host, a Baltimore merchant named Nelson, entertains the fictionalized expatriate in the same manner as Mr. Bulow entertained Brillat-Savarin—i.e., with a generous serving of American patriotism and social ineptitude. Dinner conversation, Ludovic complains, typically begins with a declamation like “General Jackson was the greatest man of the century, New York the most beautiful city in the world, the capitol [of Washington D.C.] the most magnificent palace in the universe” (37–38). He is just as arch in his account of teatime, an occasion for his host to “read aloud to us, with emphasis, those articles in the newspaper in which America was praised out of all measure” (37).

Of course, Ludovic regrets the injury done by such patriotic bluster to the social pleasure of the table—“Americans do not chat,” he says by way of conclusion (38)—but he regrets more the injury inflicted upon the merchant’s daughter, Marie, who is excluded from dinner conversation and, by Beaumont’s calculation, civic recognition, by her father’s nationalist perorations. Marie is the American’s precious, well-kept secret, the product of an ill-fated liaison dating from his misspent youth in New Orleans. For Ludovic, she is a shining example of the cultural and racial hybridity that colonial relations of *metisage* and the civic recognition of *les gens de couleur* would spread throughout the US. And so in order to intrude French foreign policy priorities into the US domestic politics of race, Ludovic imposes a courtly code of heterosocial manners on the form and content of his American travelogue: Marie thereafter becomes the center of the narrator’s attention, and of Beaumont’s American travelogue.

With this move, Beaumont effectively reverses the hierarchy that the American citizen would maintain in the national polity, but even more importantly, he vacates Marie's father's claim over the pleasurable sociality of the table. Heterosexual desire in this context operates exactly like the gourmand's exhibition of taste and alienates the socially and politically privileged foreign male subject from the fraternity of the American citizen. The table in turn becomes the abolitionist's political medium for imagining the civility and legitimacy of mixed-race sexual unions, and for initiating otherwise occluded gender relations and forbidden forms of intimacy into the discussion of national affairs.

In deference to courtly tradition, Ludovic attempts to win the blessing of Marie's father upon their ensuing love affair and eventual marriage. The condition which the father gives for that blessing—that Ludovic travel the US to test whether the country can accommodate a mixed-race couple—gives Beaumont the narrative frame for his travelogue. Nevertheless, Beaumont's object in *Marie* is to marginalize the duties and obligations which men owe each other in order to nullify the role of homosociality in the reproduction of citizenship. At the same time, Beaumont seeks to expose the institutions of civic intercourse as not just gender, but intensely race conscious, designed to reproduce the homogeneity of white male subjects regardless of what progeny the citizen might produce or in what social relations he might engage. Ludovic, in other words, glimpses the social conditions for Jacksonian democracy right there at the table, a democratic order that privileges the mutual recognition of white men to such an extent that its rituals of consensus take place anytime and anywhere, even in the midst of occasions otherwise given to spontaneous social intercourse and random emotional connections.

For Tocqueville, American democracy was the unique political culture constituted by voluntary associations, but for Beaumont, these gatherings were merely awkward, maladroit socialization practices undertaken to prevent the incorporation of minority races into the body politic. American democracy, he concluded, was not a democracy at all but a neo-colonial caste system that allowed American citizens to blunder on in their delusion, "forbidding distinctions among men, and proud to be white, as a mark of nobility . . . condemning the privilege of birth, and with stupidity maintaining the privilege of color!" (120). The US, he argued, had intertwined its civil institutions and citizenship provisions with colonial institutions of slaveholding to such an extent that it could never be known by its democratic institutions. The preservation of slavery doomed the nation to remain a colony, so that everything that looked to Tocqueville like the strength of

political association or the vitality of civil society was really what James would describe as the endgame of colonial conflict, the mobilization of *petit blancs* against *les gens de couleur*.

Beaumont wanted to leave no doubt that he and Tocqueville were actually in the midst of a colonial race war when they were touring the US, so he climaxed his novel by dramatically recalling the scenario which plunged St. Domingue into civil war and bedeviled the antislavery project of revolutionary France. In the racially mixed quarter of New York City, the neighborhood of Five Points, his ill-fated lovers think they finally have found a haven in the democratic US and a colonial-era institution, the Roman Catholic Church, which will bless their marriage. Unfortunately for them, a mob shouting the portmanteau slogan, “Death to the Catholic who marries colored women to white men” (127), breaks up the wedding of Ludovic and Marie and sends them running all the way to the remnants of France’s empire, the Indian territory of Michigan.

In restaging the colonial race war that had paralyzed the French antislavery initiative in St. Domingue, Beaumont knew that he was pursuing antislavery priorities that were both foreign to and incongruous with the American abolition movement. The latter, I have argued elsewhere, attempted to transform the formal institutions and practices of democratic citizenship into markers of minority rights (xxii–xxxi). And yet, the comically incongruous French travel writer who would discover the wrongs of slavery in a crowded theater and support the rights of African Americans to pleasurable dinner conversation was also the rare antislavery advocate who clearly understood the political crisis which gripped slaveholding America in the Jacksonian era as well as the cultural medium for waging it. The “sex panic” over racial amalgamation indeed made the American slavery question perfectly intelligible to the foreign advocate of an antislavery agenda that made the colonial institution of miscegenation the foundation of a new trans-Atlantic, transracial political and cultural order. By conflating the situation of America’s mid-nineteenth-century political crisis and France’s late eighteenth-century colonial crisis, Beaumont could make all the manifestations of democracy’s vibrant public culture, including its universal male suffrage, vindicate the morality of this international order, especially its assumption regarding the utility of heterosocial manners to morally justified interracial relations.

Beaumont held American abolitionists accountable to this standard in the last of his appendices to *Marie*, an informed, incisive account of the 1834 New York race riot. The cause of the riot, he argues, can be traced to Britain’s 1833 emancipation act,

and even further to 1799, when the abolition of slavery in New York gave the city's black population its aspiration to equality. However, the development which most clearly signals the progress of a "social revolution" in the US and which consequently arouses such "rancor" in white Americans is the increase of mixed-race unions. "Intermarriages," he states flatly, "are the most obvious index of equality" (244–245). By this measure, American abolitionists betrayed their cause and deviated from a hemispheric narrative of freedom when they issued this denial in the wake of the riot: "We entirely disclaim any desire to promote or encourage intermarriage between white and colored persons" (qtd in Beaumont 251). Even more critically, they lost the chance to turn Manhattan into the colony that liberal France had always wanted: an island whose liberty and independence originated with the civil recognition of mixed-race unions.

The fact that Beaumont thought racial equality possible only under an enlightened colonial system lays bare the counter-democratic premise of the Franco-American antislavery initiative. In restaging the violence of St. Domingue in Jacksonian America, Beaumont betrayed abject contempt for the central premise of democracy's narrative of liberation, the self-evident truth of white colonists' demands for their own political recognition by a despotic British government. These demands seem to haunt his novel, and by extension, the liberal imagination of the trans-Atlantic intellectual world; they constitute a phenomenology of terror that we know better in relation to slave insurrections. For the French abolitionist, the cause of the people of color was a palliative for this terror as well as an elegant solution to a colonial conundrum. It would ameliorate the ferocity of whites' and blacks' competing revolutionary aspirations and prevent violent conflicts between them by removing altogether the status and stigma of color in the hemispheric struggle for liberty.

Just as Beaumont was offering this solution, Tocqueville was helping to write democracy's narrative of liberation by failing to find any historical, political, or topographical feature of the North American continent that did not vindicate the egalitarian claims of white men—until the last chapter of volume one of *Democracy in America*. In the chapter entitled "The Situation of the Three Races," he confesses that he did not heretofore assess the role of enslavement and conquest in the rise of the US because they were "tangents to my subject, being American, but not democratic" (316). Beaumont, on the other hand, embraced the situation of the three races precisely because it was tangential, like women's complexions, courtship rituals, and table talk. These two erstwhile collaborators deferred their potential political conflict over race but

also devised a lasting model for addressing the interracial politics of the US by distinguishing between democratic and marginal, or trivial, subjects.

In their prefaces to their respective works, Tocqueville and Beaumont worked out an elaborate literary division of labor to suit this distinction. To his companion, Tocqueville ceded not so much a political conviction but a literary expertise in documenting “civil society, customs, ideas, and mores” (*les mœurs*, connoting both manners and morals). The result, he declares with transparent condescension toward both *Marie* and the subject of manners, was an illustration of American society that “gives to truth charms I cannot rival” (19). For his part, Beaumont concurs that “citizens enjoy in the world of politics a multitude of rights,” but he sets the stage for his own dissent by reminding us that “men may find . . . few pleasures in society” (7). And so with an incongruous encounter that would alienate the man from the citizen, and the sphere of social pleasure from the space of democracy, and the abolitionist from the theorist of democracy, Beaumont introduced a new kind of civil rights agenda into the American antislavery struggle that argued the special relevance of marginal subjects to the politics of interracial relations.

Notes

1. I owe this point about the formal dimension of Crèvecoeur’s and Tocqueville’s representations to, respectively, Nancy Ruttenburg, *Democratic Personality: Popular Voice and the Trial of American Authorship* (1998), 274–85, and Donald Pease, “Tocqueville’s Democratic Thing; or Aristocracy in America,” *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (2002), 28–33.

2. See Pease, 33–37; George M. Frederickson, “Race and Empire in Liberal Thought: The Legacy of Tocqueville,” *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements* (2000), 98–100; and Leo Marx, “On Recovering the ‘Ur’ Theory of American Studies,” *American Literary History* 17 (2006): 118–134.

3. Richard Slotkin has established the significance of these terms as symbolic domains of French Americanist discourse in his account of Paris’s prerevolutionary literary and political culture, *Regeneration through Violence: Mythologies of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (1976), 313–334.

4. Gordon Sayre argues for the symbolic mediation of money, clothing, and beavers in European trans-cultural discourses in *Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (1997), while both James McWilliams (*A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* [2005], 176–186) and Karim Tiro (“‘This Dish is Very

Good': Reflections on an Eighteenth Century Italian Ethnography of the Iroquois," *New York History* [2003]: 409–430) emphasize the importance of cuisine. My reference to civility and courtliness draws on the history as elaborated by Stephen Mennell in *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* (1995), 20–24.

5. This argument is made by Robert Launay in "Tasting the World: Food in Early European Travel Narratives," *Food and Foodways* 11 (2003): 27–47, and can be supplemented by Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson's narrative of cosmopolitanized French cuisine in the eighteenth century in *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine* (2004), 19–33. Characteristic of the moral claims made for this cuisine is Brillat-Savarin's claim that the gourmand would make "a study of man and things, in order to transport everything that deserves to be known from one place to another" (54).

6. Anthony Pagden's comparative history of American imperialisms, *Lords of All the Earth: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France, c. 1500–1800* (1995), gives special emphasis to French strategies for interracial kinship and exchange.

7. This account of English and American abolitionist history draws from Seymour Drescher, "British Way, French Way: Opinion Building and the Revolution in the Second French Slave Emancipation" and "Public Opinion and the Destruction of British Colonial Slavery," in *From Slavery to Freedom: Comparative Studies in the Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery* (1999); Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: Mobilization in a Comparative Perspective* (1987), 56–107; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (1975), 215–229; and Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (1975), 203–265.

8. See the accounts of French antislavery thought in Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspects, 1492–1900* (1983), 129–136; Shelby McCoy, *The Humanitarian Movement in 18th Century France* (1957), 97–107; and Seymour Drescher, *Tocqueville and Beaumont in Social Reform* (1968), xii–xx.

9. See Davis, *The Problem . . . Age of Revolution*, 94–96, 174–179.

10. For the social formation of postemancipation Philadelphia, see Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (1988) and "Forging Freedom: The Emancipation Experience in the Northern Seaport Cities, 1775–1820," *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (1986).

11. For Rush as an exemplar of the gradual abolition movement, see Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro: 1550–1812* (1968), 281–294, 342–379; and Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (1979), 16–68.

12. See Davis, *The Problem . . . Age of Revolution*, 240–241.

13. The renewed interest in New York City's slaveholding culture is illustrated by Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City*,

1626–1863 (2003); Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African-Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613–1863* (1999); and Ira Berlin and Leslie Harris, eds., *Slavery in New York* (2005).

14. See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (1966), 10–13, 416–418.

15. My characterization of the antislavery premises and policies of American revolutionary politics is owed to Gary Nash, *Race and Revolution* (1990), and David Brion Davis, “American Slavery and the American Revolution,” *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (1986).

16. My inflection of New York gastronomic culture with London’s “beau monde” draws on David Shields’s syncretic account of trans-Atlantic literary culture, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (1997), 11–54. Michael Batterberry and Ariane Batterberry provide the authoritative account of gastronomic life in colonial and postcolonial New York in *On the Town in New York: The Landmark History of Eating, Drinking, and Entertainments from the American Revolution to the Food Revolution* (1999), 1–49.

17. Mennell traces the gastronomic rivalry between Great Britain and France to political and social formations of the sixteenth century (108–127). John Chester Miller reprises the moral vocabulary of Jeffersonian republicanism, with its antipathy toward luxury and appetite, in *Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (1978), 31–37.

18. See Eloise Ellery, *Brissot de Warville: A Study in the History of the French Revolution* (1915), 59–72.

19. See John F. Watson, *Annals and Occurrences of New York City and State, in the Olden Times* (1846), 209–210, and Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (1999), 313–321.

20. Joseph Ellis (*American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* [1992], 220–226) and Lawrence Kaplan (*Jefferson and France: An Essay in Politics and Political Ideas* [1967], 18–37) explain this trade policy, while Peter Onuf suggests the effect of its failure on Jefferson’s racial politics in *Jefferson’s Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (2000), 178–182. John E. Crowley, on the other hand, argues for the recreation of mercantilist economic policies in the financial infrastructure of the new republic in *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (1993), 67–107.

21. My narrative synthesizes accounts by C.L.R. James (*The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* [1963]); Robin Blackburn (*The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* [1988], 161–264); Davis (*The Problem . . . Age of Revolution*, 107–112, 136–148); and Sybelle Fisher (*Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Culture of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* [2005], 222–226).

22. Carolyn Vellenga Berman creates an insightful trans-Atlantic literary history in which the feminized Creole figures as a trope of reform and bourgeois family

structure in *Creole Crossings: Domestic Fiction and the Reform of Colonial Slavery* (2006), 1–56. As my critique of Beaumont will show, I counterpoise liberal critiques of colonialism based on domesticity to the French abolitionists' courtly ideal of the public heterosociality.

23. In describing sexual relations as a stage for conceiving colonial relations, I am drawing from the critiques of colonialism made by Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), 87–107; Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (2005), 24–34, 246–260; Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery Narratives* (2000), 24–40; and Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (2004), 107–143.

24. Both John Garrigus (“Race, Gender, and Virtue in Haiti’s Foundational Fiction: *La Mulatre comme il y a peu de Blanches*,” *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall [2003]) and Sue Peabody (“Negresse/Mulatriesse/Citoyennesse: Gender and Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1650–1848,” *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, ed. Pamela Scully and Diana Paxton [2005]) argue for the central role of the sexual representation of women of color and its moral recuperation in both French and Haitian discourses of republicanism.

25. See Morgan, 144–165.

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