“AN ENTERTAINING NARRATIVE OF . . . CRUEL AND BARBAROUS TREATMENT”: CAPTIVITY, NARRATIVE, AND DEBATE IN THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC 1775-1816

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In 1979, the seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran marked the beginning of a national crisis that reshaped American politics and media. In putting in place the building blocks for the twenty-four hour cable news networks that would emerged in the subsequent decades, the Iran Hostage Crisis fundamentally altered the American public sphere. Despite the significance of this crisis in shaping American politics and culture, it was by no means the first time that the plight of Americans held captive by a foreign power had played a formative role in the development of the United States. From the beginning of the American Revolution in 1775, the imprisonment of Americans by foreign nations has influenced public debate in the United States. Key to their impact was the wide readership that followed these debates. Newspaper coverage fed and expanded these debates, drawing a wide audience to what otherwise might have been a private affair. With such wide readership, these events often times seemed to take on a life of their own, sparking national debates which extended to involve issues well beyond the fate of the hostage Americans.

During the American Revolution, the status of British-held American prisoners reflected the status of the nation. In both public and private venues, American and British officials engaged in an ongoing debate over the status of the captured Americans. At its core, this exchange was a debate about the legitimacy of the American cause.
Following American independence, the plight of American sailors held captive in the Barbary States of North Africa served as a focal point for a wide range of issues in the new American Republic. From the debate over the creation and ratification of a new Constitution to a debate about the role of the American people in government the imprisonment of American sailors served as a lightening rod at key moments in the development of the American public sphere. Finally, in the final years of the War of 1812 and in the wake of the success of the American fleet in finally bringing an end to the Barbary threat in the Mediterranean, the national discussion over the fate of captive Americans served to bolster national confidence and establish an independent American sense of self.
Dedicated to my Family

Brooke, Morbo, David, Laura, Kate, Paul, Charlie, and Dan
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INTRODUCTION

On January 20, 1981, fifty-two Americans boarded a plane at Iran’s Mehrabad Airport. The airport itself was blacked out for fear of Iraqi air raids, but the passengers had no trouble finding their way as the lights of television cameras illuminated their path across the tarmac. The flight was bound for Algeria and its American passengers had spent the previous four hundred forty-four days in Iran as “guests of the ayatollah.” The Americans had been taken hostage when Iranian student protesters had seized the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979. Fittingly, the hostages’ departure from Iran coincided with Jimmy Carter’s departure from the White House. The Iranian hostage crisis had dominated Carter’s final year in office and had emerged as one of the critical issues in the presidential election of 1980. Carter had worked tirelessly during his final days in office to negotiate a settlement and secure the release of the American hostages, hoping to bring an end to the standoff before his term in office expired. Although Carter had been denied the satisfaction of announcing the resolution of the crisis from the White House he was able to make the announcement to those who had gathered to greet him as he returned to his home in Plains, Georgia. “Just a few moments ago on Air Force One,” he announced “before we landed at Warner Robins, I received word officially for the first time that the aircraft carrying the fifty-two American hostages
. . . has cleared Iranian airspace. Every one of the fifty-two hostages is alive, well, and free.” After more than a year of negotiations, a failed rescue attempt, and a presidential election, the standoff in Tehran was finally at an end.¹

In addition to its impact on Carter’s presidency, the reach of Iranian hostage crisis extended beyond the realm of politics to reshape the American media. In response to events in Iran, Television networks extended their news casts and created hour-long primetime specials exploring and analyzing the crisis in great detail. Four days after the embassy was overrun, ABC News began running a late night news program, opposite NBC’s The Tonight Show, entitled The Iran Crisis—America Held Hostage. Hosted by Ted Koppel, the news program, which would eventually be renamed Nightline, provided the American people with daily updates of the situation in Iran and kept a running tally of the days since the captive Americans had first been imprisoned. Before long, the families of the hostages became the center of much of the media attention. They found themselves surrounded by reporters and barraged with telephone calls from interview seekers. In “man on the street” interviews, Americans vacillated between calling for the President to “get off his duff,” or to avoid direct conflict because “I don’t want [the hostages] to be harmed.” The crisis in Iran focused national attention on a single issue that evolved into a national conversation extending from the halls of Congress to the “man on the street” and reshaping the contours of the American public sphere.²

² Ibid., 189-194.
The imprisonment of the fifty-two Americans reshaped the American political and cultural landscape. By the end of the crisis, the United States had witnessed a change in government and a shift in the American news media. Yet the impact of the crisis in Iran was not an isolated incident. The plight of Americans held captive by a foreign power has long had a powerful hold on the American mind and served as a force to reshape debate in the United States. During the colonial era, the threat of imprisonment at the hands of the Native Americans or the French informed both politics and culture. During the American Revolution, reports of British prison conditions helped sway public opinion to the patriot cause. In the earliest years of the Republic, the imprisonment of American sailors in North Africa and in England again excited the American people, shaping everything from theatrical performances to political debate. National attention and debate surrounding the fate of the captive Americans opened the door wide to a range of voices. This cacophony of voices, which included everyone from members of Congress to the prisoners themselves, eventually resulted in the formation of public opinion on how best to respond to threat of captivity. In the Early Republic, all of this occurred in what John Brooke called a “chaotic, anarchic, but productive public sphere of civil society, where a contest of ideas leads to the strategic coalescence of opinion.” The chaotic national debates sparked by plight of imprisoned Americans helped reshape and refine an emerging public sphere.3

While the earliest moments of an American public sphere are the topic of some debate, there seems to be general agreement that by the 1780s the United States had witnessed a change in the way information was shared and discussed. Newspapers, pamphlets, and public debate proliferated in the years following the American Revolution. With these changes, a world in which the civic discourse was the “conversation of the people” replaced the world in which civic discourse was “words of the authoritative few to the people.” These changes allowed for a new model of civil society to emerge. Political actors came to include a wide cross-section of citizens. American society allowed for debate to occur between its citizens, in the press, and in public displays such as parades and civic festivals. Local events became national events as newspapers narrated the activities to a nationwide audience. The public sphere was opened wide to expression of political or social dissent. Through public demonstrations, the press, and even the theater, the people of the United States found a means to make their voices heard in civil society.  

This expansion of the public sphere was inexorably linked to the growth of the American press. Following the French and Indian War the number of newspapers being published in North America rose to forty weekly papers. During the Revolution the

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number fell to thirty-five. In the wake of the debate surrounding the ratification of the Constitution, in 1790, that number grew to ninety-one regularly published newspapers with eight daily papers. By 1800 the numbers would rise even further to 234 regularly published newspapers, twenty-four of which were published daily. The growth of the press served as a critical component in the “chaotic” realm of the public sphere that facilitated the development of public opinion.5

The expansion of American media allowed the captivity stories that might have once been limited to local or regional attention to be broadcast around the nation. With expanded coverage came expanded debates over the fate of imprisoned Americans. With such wide readership, these events often times seemed to take on a life of their own, sparking national debates involving issues well beyond the fate of the hostage Americans. During the American Revolution, the debate over the treatment of British-held American prisoners became the focus of national attention. In both public and private venues, American and British officials engaged in an ongoing debate over the status of the captured Americans. American officials and even some of the prisoners detailed the horrid conditions in British prisons, while British officials, following an official inquiry claimed that any unsanitary conditions were the fault of the prisoners themselves. As the debate over the plight of American prisoners grew, so too did its meaning, before long

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5These numbers are taken from Copeland, “America 1750-1820,” 149. In addition to the growth of the American press, Richard John has argued that the United States postal system operated under policies which encouraged the distribution of these newspapers to a national audience. Richard John, Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse (Cambridge, MA, 1995). The expanding press and the national audience for these newspapers was a critical factor in the development of an American Public Sphere.
Americans were not only defending prisoners rights, but the legitimacy of the American cause.

Following American independence, the plight of American sailors held captive in the Barbary States of North Africa served as a focal point for a wide range of issues in the new American Republic. From the debate over the creation and ratification of a new Constitution to a debate about the role of the American people in government the imprisonment of American sailors served as a lightening rod that harnessed and redirected the growing power of the American public sphere. Finally, following the War of 1812 and in the wake of American naval success in the Mediterranean, the national discussion over the fate of captive Americans served to bolster national confidence and establish an independent American sense of self as Americans celebrated their wave of victories over the British and the Barbary States of North Africa.

The first chapter explores how the debate over the treatment of American prisoners held by the British military was open to a wide range of voices which helped to expand the bounds of a developing American public sphere. While the initial exchange was limited to American and British officials, the publication of these letters in the American press opened the door to new voices as concerned citizens and even the prisoners themselves entered the debate in government hearings, in the press, and in the publication of captivity narratives. From the beginning of the Revolution, Americans highlighted acts of British cruelty wherever they were to be found. By the end of the war, Americans had come to define themselves not only as the true keepers of traditional
British, now American, liberty, but as morally superior for their resistance to a cruel enemy.\textsuperscript{6}

The changing nature of the public sphere and the nature of the debate over the plight of the captive Americans became a key component in the development of what Charles Royster has labeled the United States’ national character. While Royster sees the professionalization of the Continental Army and a sense of destiny as the key components to the development of this character, I argue that the debate over prisoners allowed a growing number of Americans to join in the effort to define themselves in opposition to a “barbarous other.” These efforts to label the British as other built on the existing colonial practices that had found the “other” in the Catholic French and the various Native American groups with whom they battled for control of North America.

In pointing to the Revolution as a critical turning point in the development of an American character, this study differs from other recent studies which see the critical moments of the development of an American character occurring in the years following the war in the contest to shape the memory of the American Revolution. The best of these studies include works by Michael Kammen, Alfred Young, and Sarah Purcell.\textsuperscript{7}

The second section of this dissertation explores the impact of the conflict with the Barbary States in development of the political culture of the Early American Republic.

\textsuperscript{6} See Linda Colley, Captives: The Story of Britain’s pursuit of empire and how its soldiers and civilians were held captive by the dream of global supremacy 1600-1850 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 219-227.

In the years following the Revolution Congress not only lacked the resources to achieve much in the realm of foreign policy, but also lacked the political will to do anything about it. The opening moments of what have come to be called the Barbary Wars, specifically, the crisis in Algiers, focused national attention on the issue of American security and contributed to a change in the structure of the American government.

Chapter two explores how this crisis in North Africa forced many Americans to confront the scope of the international challenges facing the nation. The plight of the American captives in Algiers demonstrated the underdeveloped nature of the national economy, the lack of respect for the United States shown by European nations, and the inability of the United States government to protect the liberty of its citizens. The crisis in Algiers brought the flaws of the Confederation government and the importance of international relations into sharp focus and made clear the need for reform at the national level.

Prior to 1789, the limited national government that existed under the Articles of Confederation had little power to direct national or international affairs. Dependent on contributions from the various states and loans from foreign governments, the Continental Congress was unable to provide basic protection for the people of the United States. The safety of the American citizens required the creation of a more powerful federal government. At the same time, the expansion of federal power aided in the development of a distinctly American public sphere. The establishment of an expanded government power created a superstructure which served to facilitate a process of deliberation. The crisis in Algiers generated a debate that became part of a larger push to
create such a government. With the ratification of the Constitution and the creation of a new federal government a new structure was put in place to improve American security and support a fully functional public sphere.  

In exploring the role of the crisis in Algiers on the development of the American public sphere, this study offers a new perspective on the significance of the Barbary Wars. Much of the current scholarship dealing with this topic is limited almost exclusively to an examination of the diplomatic and military aspects of the conflict. Among the most useful of these diplomatic and military studies are H.G. Barnaby’s *The Prisoners of Algiers*, Frederick Marks III, *Independence on Trial* and Richard B. Parker’s *Uncle Sam in Barbary*. Lawrence Peskin has expanded on these earlier works providing an analysis of the impact of the Algerian Crisis on the character of American foreign policy, but the does not offer a more detailed study of the impact of the crisis on American politics and society as a whole. Robert Allison in *The Crescent Obscured* offers an analysis of the cultural impact of the American interaction with the Barbary States of North Africa but does not fully integrate this cultural study with an examination

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The third chapter traces the impact of the crisis in Algiers on the relationship between the American public and the new United States government following the ratification of the Constitution. By the 1790s, all of the pieces necessary for an expansive public sphere were in place in the United States and it was issues of foreign policy that would put it to the test. The crisis in Algiers helped focus national attention and laid the foundation for an extensive debate that would stretch beyond the borders of the United States to the shores of North Africa. In addition to the broad range of participants, this debate shaped the dynamic that was emerging between the newly created federal government and the American people. Despite the efforts of many within the federal government to limit access to the debate, active members of the American public were unwilling to be shut out. Even as the Federalist members of Congress sought to bring an end to the debate by legislating a military solution to the crisis, a growing number of
concerned citizens continued their efforts to raise funds to secure the release of the prisoners at Algiers.

Todd Estes has recently argued that between period between 1794 and 1796 witnessed an alteration of “the entire political system within which the nascent parties operated.” This change occurred as the Federalists changed their understanding of the public sphere by orchestrating a Jay Treaty petition drive with the direct intent to use the voice of the people to shape public policy. Such engagement between the government and the public was something that Federalists had long opposed and believed should not happen in the new republic. An examination of the debate over Algiers reveals the likely roots of this shift. In responding to the crisis in Algiers through petitions, letters, newspapers, and the theater, many in the American public demonstrated their involvement in national policy. From the captive sailors themselves to members of Congress, almost every sector of American society played some role in the debate over Algiers. Even though many Federalists were initially opposed to the public efforts, they eventually recognized the power of a motivated citizenry. It was recognition of the power of these active citizens that prepared the Federalists for the fight over the ratification of the Jay Treaty a year later. Based on the examination of the Algiers debate, the mobilization of public opinion around the Jay Treaty was part of an emerging political culture that had begun as early as 1783.10

The fourth chapter examines the national debate over the treatment of prisoners of war during the War of 1812. This debate divided the nation along party lines. The

Federalists’ opposition to the Madison administration’s prisoner policy stemmed from two interrelated points. The first was a belief that Madison had expanded the power of the presidency beyond its constitutional bounds. In the face of this perceived threat, Federalist cast their opposition to the war and the president as a defense of American ideals from the threat of a tyrannical president. Secondly, the Federalists argued that the rationale justifying Madison’s use of close confinement was specious. Madison’s policy of retaliation came about following the Battle of Queenston Heights when twenty-three naturalized Americans who had been born in the British Isles, were transported to England to stand trial for treason. Royal officials argued that despite these soldiers’ claim of American citizenship, they had been born in the United Kingdom and were therefore to be treated as traitors to the crown. Federalists agreed with the British interpretation, arguing that Congress and the President had no right to harass American-held prisoners in defense of these British-born soldiers. An examination of the debate over the treatment of prisoners during the War of 1812 offers insight into the evolving definition of American citizenship.11

Additionally, the debate over the policy of retaliation places the Federalists in a new light. Contrary to Richard Buel’s recent categorization of the Federalists as a subversive opposition, the Federalists, in opposing the Madison administration and working to limit retaliation, were working to protect the republican experiment rather than subvert it. Buel, focusing primarily on the Massachusetts Federalists, argues that the Federalists worked “to subvert that national government after 1800” and goes as far as to

declare that “Federalist behavior, rather than British actions, was the critical factor propelling the Republicans to declare war in 1812.” Buel’s account fails to fully engage the Federalist rationale for opposing the war, instead portraying Federalists from a distinctly Republican perspective.  

The final chapter examines the aftermath of the War of 1812 and the final phase of the Barbary Wars. While nineteenth-century politicians and historians have cited Andrew Jackson’s victory at the Battle of New Orleans as a critical moment in America’s “second war of independence,” an examination of international relations in the subsequent months demonstrates the continuing vulnerability of the United States. The shooting of American sailors at England’s Dartmoor Prison in the spring of 1815 overshadowed Jackson’s victory and left Americans feeling unsure of their place in the world. These feelings of vulnerability were finally overcome following the success of the United States Navy in North Africa in the summer of 1815. Following reports of Decatur’s settlement with Algiers, the “massacre at Dartmoor” came to be described as the last gasp of a dying empire and coverage of the Dartmoor shootings was replaced with news of the victory of the American Navy. In forcing an end to the tribute demands of the Barbary States, the United States had succeeded where the nations of Europe had failed. By 1815, American self-confidence was defined not only in relation to England, but as a rising Atlantic power.

12 Richard Buel, American on the Brink: How the Political Struggle over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 2.
Collectively, an examination of the debates that emerged surrounding the treatment of imprisoned Americans during the era of the American Revolution and the Early American Republic reveals a great deal about the evolving contours of politics and culture in the young United States. From expanding the boundaries of public debate to defining the limits of citizenship, the plight of Americans held captive by a foreign power reshaped the balance of power in the Early Republic. From the Congressional speeches to celebratory toasts the narratives of captivity captured the imagination of the American people.
CHAPTER 1

“OBLIGATIONS ARISING FROM THE RIGHTS OF HUMANITY”: AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR AND PUBLIC OPINION IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Writing from Cambridge in August of 1775, George Washington addressed Thomas Gage, commander of the British forces in America, inquiring into the nature of the treatment of American soldiers who had been captured as prisoners of war. Noting that American soldiers were being detained in “a common Gaol appropriated for Felons,” Washington requested that Gage adhere to “Obligations arising from the Rights of Humanity” and offer those who had been captured “a more tender Treatment.” Washington argued that although Gage might think little of the American soldiers, “they act from the noblest of all Principles, a Love of Freedom and their Country.” Washington warned that if Gage could not offer better treatment to these men, he would be forced to respond in kind and, despite Washington’s own aversion to such actions, British soldiers captured by Americans “would feel its effects.” Two days later, Gage responded. He claimed no wrongdoing on the part of British jailers, but instead pointed out the hardships British soldiers had been forced to endure in American prison camps,
“laboring. . .to gain their daily subsistence, or reduced to the wretched alternative, to perish by famine or take arms against their King and country.”¹⁴

This exchange was the first in what became an ongoing debate over the issue of the treatment of prisoners that would continue until well after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War. At its core, this exchange was a debate about the legitimacy of the American cause. Americans captured while fighting against the British in the early years of the Revolution faced an uncertain status. If they were part of a legitimate military force, as Washington argued, these Americans would deserve to be treated as proper prisoners of war. Yet, if the British were to treat the captured Americans as prisoners of war rather than as common criminals, it would be a de facto recognition of the American move toward independence. Recognizing the importance of this debate, both English and American officials made sure to defend their efforts both through private communications and in the press. More significantly, the debate was opened wide to participation at nearly every level of society. Eventually the prisoners themselves came to have a voice in the debate. The open nature of the debate and the discussion of American virtue in the face of British cruelty became important elements in defining the young nation. By the end of the Revolution, the debate over the treatment of the American prisoners in the hands of the British had become a formative element of what has been labeled an “American character.”¹⁵

¹⁵Parliament finally passed an act designating American captives as “prisoners of war” on 25 March 1782. Charles Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979). While Royster sees the
The initial exchange between Washington and Gage was published shortly after it took place “by order of the Honorable Congress” in September of 1775. The Congressional order to have this exchange published followed a practice that had first emerged in Massachusetts during the series of boycotts and protests in the years leading up to the military conflict with Britain. The critical moment, as one historian has noted, came in the form of the Boston town meeting in May of 1764. Faced with a question as to how to respond to Parliament’s Revenue Act of 1764 the members of the Massachusetts colonial legislature brought the issue before a wide range of colonial citizens at this open meeting. Thus, rather than keeping discussion of the issue within the closed ranks of legislature, as had traditionally been the case, the arena of discussion was opened wide to a broad range of citizens. The issue was to be decided by an “informed citizenry.” In encouraging such broad participation, even if unintentionally, these Massachusetts officials established what would become the model for the colonial resistance. By expanding the discussion to include a wide cross-section of the citizenry the patriot cause had discovered its base of power. Beyond garnering local support, wide dissemination of news of local resolutions and acts of colonial resistance helped inform professionalization of the Continental Army and the sense of destiny as the key components to the development of this character, I argue that the debate over prisoners allowed Americans to define themselves in opposition to a “barbarous other,” in this case the British, as they had done for generations in the face of the French and various Native American groups with whom they came into conflict. For more on this definition of British/American identity in opposition to that of Native Americans see Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage Books 1998). Additionally, a number of historians including Michael Kammen, Alfred Young, and Sarah Purcell have explored how the memory of the American Revolution shaped the national character in the years following Revolution. This chapter argues that the formation of a national character began during the Revolution itself rather than in the contest for the memory of the Revolution in the decades that followed. Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978); Alfred Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Sarah Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).
policy and actions in other parts of the colonies. In publishing local actions the audience became not only citizens directly involved in political actions, but Patriot leaders and British officials throughout the colonies. The establishment of these networks were especially important in the years following the Revenue Act as during the Stamp Act crisis and in the wake of the Townshend Duties opposition to Parliamentary action required the inclusion of a broad section of the colonial population.16

In requesting that the exchange between Washington and Gage be published, the members of Congress built on the experiences during the earlier crises and displayed an awareness of the power of the press to shape public opinion in the battle for American hearts and minds during the Revolution. The members of Congress understood that if they were to succeed in their efforts against the English military they would need the support of the people at large and, following the Massachusetts model, the best way to achieve such support was to present the case directly to the people themselves. When, in May of 1776, the Continental Congress established its own rules for the treatment of prisoners seized by American forces they made sure that these guidelines were “immediately published.” These rules gave responsibility for the care of captives to the states in which they had been captured but required that those detained “be treated as prisoners of war, but with humanity, and be allowed the same rations as the troops in the

service of the United Colonies.” Despite Washington’s threat that British prisoners might feel the effects of mistreatment, members of Congress sought to demonstrate that, unlike the British, the Americans would treat their captives with the utmost respect, providing rations equal to that of their own soldiers.\(^\text{17}\)

These efforts to keep the people informed of the status of American prisoners were not limited to the efforts of government officials. Reports of prison conditions from across the nation made their way into the press. From Boston came news that captive American sailors were being “whipped with a wire cat of nine tails that drew blood every stroke.” In Philadelphia the Pennsylvania Packet published accounts of “numerous instances of prisoners of war perishing in all the agonies of hunger, from their severe treatment.” A former prisoner held in New York reported that “the distress of prisoners cannot be communicated by words, 20 or 30 die every day, they lie in heaps unburied.” It was his hope that public outrage, and possibly American retaliation might protect those who remained alive in the prisons. As for himself, he stated that “rather than experience again [British] barbarity and insults, may [he] fall by the sword of the Hessian.” These reports only served to further cement the impression that many colonists had formed during the French and Indian War. The conflict between England and France had resulted in an unprecedented level of contact between the American colonists and

members of the British military. Much of this contact came in the form of British military discipline. These interactions left many colonists with a dim view of the Britons they had once held in high esteem. Members of the provincial force were most struck by the merciless and haughty nature of the British regulars when recounting their interaction. Based on these encounters, many in the colonies felt that it was only with their through their assistance that the British were able to seize control of North America. By the time of the Revolution it was this same attitude, coupled with reports of British cruelty toward American prisoners, that assured Americans of the righteousness of their cause.¹⁸

Efforts to link the cause of American independence with the plight of American prisoners were encouraged in the narratives of the captives themselves. The practice of former captives recounting their sufferings at the hand of a ‘savage other’ to a broad audience had deep roots in American culture. Such tales of captivity form the core of much of colonial American literature. Throughout the colonial period these captivity narratives were published for and absorbed by an eager public. As early as the 1670s, during King Philip’s War, American presses published editions of the tales of “redeemed” captives. These tales often related experience among various Indian tribes, recounting treks deep into Indian territory and their eventual return to colonial society. As the tensions between England and its colonies grew in the 1760s and 1770s, two of

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the most well known American captivity narratives witnessed a resurgence in popularity.19

John Williams’s *The Redeemed Captive* and Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, each published almost a century before the conflict between the American Revolution, found a new audience as unease over the actions of the British Parliament grew in the American colonies. Between 1770 and 1776 both these narratives, which had been reprinted only three times since their original publication, were reprinted nine times. Publishers throughout New England advertised their new editions of these earlier narratives promising descriptions of “a most barbarous and cruel treatment” and a narrative of “captivity and deliverance.” Spurred in part by the centennial of King Philip’s War, the American colonists saw their plight reflected in the experience of John Williams and Mary Rowlandson at the hands of Indian enemies. In late 1775, the Reverend Nathan Fiske stood before his congregation in Brookfield, Massachusetts and offered *An Historical Discourse Concerning the Settlement of Brookfield and its Distresses during the Indian Wars*. In his sermon, Fiske drew a direct line between the experience of the people of Brookfield in the late seventeenth century and the experience of the American people in the late eighteenth century:

> When our fore-fathers took sanctuary in these then inhospitable shores, it was to secure to themselves and their progeny “peace, liberty and safety.” When they purchased lands of the natives, they thought them their own: and when they cultivated them for their children whom they hoped to leave free and happy, they little thought their posterity would be disturbed in their possessions by *Britons*, more than themselves were by savage Indians.

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And at the conclusion of the last war, which seemed to put an end to our fears of any molestation for the Savages for time to come, who could have thought that the same nation that then assisted us in conquering them, would ever have laid such a plan . . . who could have thought that Britons would practice what the uncultivated tribes of Indians have refused to do: and that they themselves would distress and destroy our most populous towns on the sea coast, when the Savages could not be prevailed on by flatteries or gifts to molest our back settlements?

Fiske placed the current American crisis in a larger historical context. In equating British actions to those of the “savages” he portrayed the American cause as a just opposition to a brutal enemy. In reacquainting themselves with the captivity narratives and experience of an earlier generation, the American colonists understood the importance of controlling the interpretation of a war even as it was being fought.²⁰

As early as 1779 a new wave of captivity narratives began to appear. These narratives followed in the style of the earlier accounts and presented clear evidence that the British had indeed sunk to levels of “savagery.” Published throughout the colonies, these accounts attracted a readership which proved so broad that many became best-sellers. The most popular of the prisoner narratives were those of Ethan Allen and John Dodge, whose narratives each were reprinted several times during the war. Both Allen and Dodge recounted their experiences at the hands of the British taking great pains to provide an accounting of British atrocities and their own fortitude in the face of such

²⁰Nathan Fiske, *Remarkable Providences to be gratefully recollected, religious improved, and carefully transmitted to Posterity. A Sermon Preached at Brookfield On the last Day of the Year 1775* (Boston: Printed by Thomas and John Fleet, 1776) 28-29. Rowlandson’s narrative was advertised in *The Massachusetts Spy* on 12 September 1771, 26 September 1771, and 3 October 1771; in *New London Gazette* (CT) December 3, 1773 and *Newport Mercury* (RI) March 7, 1774 and March 14, 1774. William’s narrative in *New London Gazette* (CT), April 9, 1773, March 23, 1776, and May 3, 1776. See also Jill Lepore, *The Name of War* 186-190. Greg Siemenski, has commented that this renewed interest in the captivity narrative and the connection of the King Philip’s War to that of the American Revolution “represents a crucial development in the emergence of a national culture.” Siemenski, “The Puritan Captivity Narrative and the Politics of the American Revolution” *American Quarterly* 2 (1990): 35-56. Also see Jill Lepore’s discussion of controlling the narrative of war in *The Name of War* 48-68.
cruelty. In both narratives, each captive’s fortitude provided a model for Americans to follow. The resolve demonstrated by both Allen and Dodge served as an example for all those forced to endure hardships for the cause of American independence.\textsuperscript{21}

Ethan Allen’s \textit{Narrative of Col. Ethan Allen’s Captivity} was a tremendous success from the first. The narrative went through eight editions in the first two years after its publication, and another nineteen editions in the following half century. Allen was taken captive by British forces in a failed American raid on Montreal in September of 1775. His earlier success in the war, particularly the seizure of Fort Ticonderoga and his attempts to encourage the Caughnawagas and the merchants of Montreal to turn against England, had generated a great deal of distaste among the British for the American military hero. As a result of his exploits, Allen was subjected to some of the harshest prison conditions of any captive officer during the war. Allen’s captivity spanned the Atlantic as he was eventually transferred to New York by way of Ireland, North Carolina, and Halifax. It was only when he reached British-occupied New York that he was finally granted parole, splitting his time between Manhattan and Long Island. Allen’s time in British hands lasted almost three years before his freedom was negotiated in May of 1778.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} The most well known of the narratives was Ethan Allen’s Narrative of Captivity which was first published in 1779 and later published in installments in the Pennsylvania Gazette. There are however a number of narratives that followed this initial work. These works include John Dodge’s \textit{An Entertaining Narrative of the cruel and barbarous Treatment and extreme Suffering of Mr. John Dodge During his Captivity of Many Months Among the British}, (Danvers, Mass.: 1780); John Blatchford’s \textit{Narrative of the Life and Captivity of John Blatchford} (New London: T. Green, 1788); Israel Potter’s \textit{Life and remarkable adventures of Israel R. Potter, (a native of Cranston, Rhode-Island) who was a soldier in the American revolution, after which he was taken prisoner by the British, conveyed to England, where for 30 years he obtained a livelihood, by crying “Old chairs to mend”} (Providence: Printed by H. Trumbull, 1824).

\textsuperscript{22} John Pell, \textit{Ethan Allen} (New York, 1929); and Siemenski, “The Puritan Captivity Narrative and Politics of the American Revolution,” 46. See Michael Belvesiles, \textit{Revolutionary Outlaws: Ethan Allen and the
The account of Allen’s captivity was published only a year after his release. In the course of his narrative, Allen went to great lengths to highlight his behavior as a virtuous American in the face of British cruelty. To that end, he made sure to describe the conditions that he and his fellow prisoners faced in great detail. Upon capture, the injured members of his party were kept in a hospital in Montreal, while other members of his forces were put onboard different vessels in the river “and shackled together by pairs, viz. two men fasted together by one hand-cuff, being closely fixed to one wrist of each of them, and treated with the greatest severity, nay as criminals.” Allen himself was placed in hand-cuffs of “common size and form,” but he found his leg irons to be clamped “very tight” around his ankles and he imagined them to weigh thirty pounds. So restrictive were these irons that he could not lie down except on his back. Once aboard the transport, Allen was “put into the lowest and most wretched part of the vessel.” Allen also made sure to note that the “severity” of his treatment was the result of “express orders” given to the captain of the transport.?

In addition to the description of harsh conditions immediately following his capture, Allen also included a detailed account of his passage to England:

We were denied fresh water, except a small allowance, which was very inadequate to our wants; and in consequence of the stench of the place, each of us was soon followed with a diarrhea and fever, which occasioned intolerable thirst. When we asked for water, we were, most commonly, instead of obtaining it, insulted and derided; and to add to all the horrors of the place, it was so dark that we could not see each other, and were overspread with body lice.

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Allen’s description of his prison experience, consistent with the description of conditions on the prison ships in New York, added his voice to the calls for improved treatment of American prisoners. In joining the debate over prisoners of war, Allen asserted himself on a national stage, giving an individual face to the experience of captivity, and offering his own vision of what it meant to be an American. 24

Much of Allen’s efforts to describe American character revolved around a discussion of his captors themselves. While he did make mention of those who treated him well, on the whole, he viewed his British captors as cruel and brutal. Facing execution in England, Allen noted that he was extremely concerned for his life considering that he “was in the power of a haughty and cruel nation.” In the face of such treatment, Allen resolved to “exhibit a good sample of American fortitude . . .[and] that if a cruel death must inevitably be [his] portion, [he] would faced it undaunted.” Going beyond the public debate over prisoner treatment, Allen’s narrative was filled with examples of his American virtue and Yankee pride, standing strong in the face of British insult. Allen’s narrative made explicit the argument that the early efforts in prisoner relief had only hinted at. Allen defined Americaness in the face of British cruelty, and portrayed himself as the model American. 25

Only a year after the publication of Allen’s narrative, John Dodge published An Entertaining Narrative of the cruel and barbarous Treatment and extreme Suffering of Mr. John Dodge During his Captivity of Many Months Among the British. Hoping to follow in the success of Allen’s narrative, the first page of Dodge’s narrative actually

24 Ibid., 40.
25 Ibid., 42, 44.
included an advertisement for Allen’s work. Dodge’s narrative recounted his capture in the Ohio country and his captivity in Detroit. This narrative conformed closely to the model provided by earlier Puritan narratives, substituting the British for an Indian other. This identification of the British as other is underscored by Dodge’s labeling of the British as a cruel and barbarous, while the Indian tribes of this region were depicted as potential allies to be wooed.

Born in Connecticut, Dodge migrated to the Great Lakes region in 1770 and settled in the village of Sandusky, in what was to become Ohio. Dodge described his new home as “about half way between Pittsburgh and Detroit, where I carried on a very beneficial trade with the natives, until the unhappy dispute between Great-Britain and America reached those pathless wilds, and *roused to war Savages in no ways interested in it* (italics mine).” As a trader, Dodge learned to speak several Indian languages and depicted himself as a go-between in the American efforts to persuade the Native Americans in the region to remain neutral in the English-American conflict. In the end, his efforts were for naught, as the English succeeded in assuring an alliance by spreading “evil reports” among the Indians and promising that those who allied with the British would “have all America to themselves.”

Dodge was taken captive shortly after the British persuaded the Indians to join their cause, and he was held at Detroit for most of the war. Dodge described his treatment at the hands of British captors much as Allen had, labeling his British captors as “inhuman” and barbarous, calling them “savage adversaries.” According to Dodge, it

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26 John Dodge, *An Entertaining Narrative of the cruel and barbarous Treatment and extreme Suffering of Mr. John Dodge During his Captivity of Many Months Among the British*, (Danvers, Mass.: 1780), 5.
was his influence with the Natives that resulted in his incarceration. He argued that the
English were jealous and wary of his connection with the Natives, punishing him for his
“damn’d deal of influence with the Indians.” Upon his arrival in Detroit, Dodge was told
that he would most likely be executed and then was “hurried to a loathsome dungeon,
ironed and thrown in with three criminals, being allowed neither bedding, straw or fire,
although it was in the depth of winter, and so exceeding cold, that [his] toes were froze
before morning.” Dodge made sure to point out that not only was he threatened with
execution, but that his British captors had also refused to allow him a fair trial. His
requests for a hearing were denied when British officials stated that they were “not
obliged to give any damn’d rebel a trial.”

Living under the constant threat of execution and extremely harsh conditions,
Dodge “at last drove almost to despair. . .told [his jailor Philip] De Jeane to inform the
Governor [he] was readier to die at that time than [he] should ever be, and that [he] would
much rather undergo his sentence, than be tortured in the dreadful manner [he] then was.”
De Jeane ignored Dodge’s request, leaving him to suffer in his cell. Dodge reported that
he eventually succumbed to illness. “The weather had been so extreme cold, and my legs
had been bolted in such a manner, that they were so benumbed, and the sinews
contracted, that I had not the least use of them; and the severity of my usage had brought
on a fever.” During his illness, fearing that he might die in captivity, British officials
eventually transported Dodge to better housing and allowed him to be seen by a doctor.
After a period of convalescence, however, Dodge was returned to his cell and once again

27 Ibid., 10-12.
placed in irons. Making matters worse, Dodge reports, “the weather was now growing warm and the place offensive, from the filth of the poor fellows I had left there and who were afterwards executed.” Back in his cell, Dodge’s health deteriorated yet again. The doctor finally persuaded De Jeane that Dodge could not survive under such conditions. He was granted parole, but kept under strict British observation for the rest of the war.28

When the war ended, Dodge traveled to New York where he was received by George Washington and sent on to Congress, as he was deemed to have some matters “worthy their hearing.” These matters included his vision of peaceful American relations with the tribes in the Great Lakes region. Unlike others who occupied this “middle ground” between Indians and whites, Dodge, at least as he presents himself, was deemed someone who could offer a valuable service as a result of his experience with the Natives of the Northwest, working to help establish relations between the new United States and the native peoples of this region. Such a vision offered a new spin on an emerging American identity. For Dodge, Americanness could include a working relationship with the tribes of the Great Lakes region.29

Dodge’s narrative played on many of the same themes employed by Allen. His style followed the pattern established in the Puritan captivity narratives of an earlier generation. He certainly seemed to hope to make a name for himself through a description of his suffering and through his contact with important members of the American government, and he sought to offer a full accounting of the conditions faced by

28 Ibid., 13-16.
American prisoners of war. Additionally, Dodge’s narrative raised the issue of the place of Native Americans in the Revolution. While the experience of Native American during the Revolution were far from uniform, American citizens tended to over simplify the experience of all Native Americans simply labeling all Indians as “savage allies of a tyrannical monarch.” John Dodge, however, in recounting his experience in captivity, offered a vision of the United States that might include a place for Native Americans. In Dodge’s experience it had been British propaganda and out right lies which had led the tribes around Sandusky to turn against the cause of American independence. With the British threat removed, Dodge’s narrative suggested that a beneficial relationship might be established between the natives of the Great Lakes region and the newly independent United States. Americanness for both Allen and Dodge was defined as not British and using such a definition Dodge sought to include a space for Native Americans. Although Dodge’s vision was ultimately drowned out by a wave of settlers flooding into the newly opened western lands, his ability to present his vision to a large audience is itself significant. His experience as a prisoner allowed him a platform from which he could make himself heard at the highest levels of the new American government.  

Despite the common theme of British cruelty the experiences of Americans captured by the British varied greatly, depending on the circumstances surrounding their imprisonment. Captives taken early in the war, and who could not be exchanged, were often sent to Canada or England. It some cases, particularly in the case of those captured at sea, British officials hoped that the isolation from their home country would induce

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prisoners to join the British navy. In total, roughly three thousand Americans, mostly those captured at sea, were held in England during the course of the Revolution. Initially, Americans captured at sea and brought to England were kept aboard the ships that had borne them to England. The use of these ships as prisons had a specific legal rationale behind it. Given that the government of Great Britain did not recognize the United States as a sovereign nation, any prisoners brought ashore could claim their rights as Englishmen and call for a civil trial and claim the right to release on bail. Eventually, the sheer numbers of prisoners forced the British authorities to revise this position, and with the passage of the North Act on 3 March 1777, the dilemma was resolved. The North Act included statutes declaring that the British government would reserve and exercise its judicial powers of punishment against those caught in rebellion. Americans captured on land could be tried for treason, and those caught at sea tried for piracy. With the passage of the North Act, prisoners could be brought ashore and held indefinitely in English prisons without fear that they could lay claim to their rights as Englishmen or as prisoners of war.  

Once the North Act was in place, prisoners were brought ashore, with the majority of them being detained at Forton Prison in Portsmouth and the Old Mill Prison in Plymouth. While Parliament had denied these prisoners many of their rights, the attention of the English public helped ameliorate the conditions that might have otherwise deteriorated. With the arrival of the first American prisoners, there was a great curiosity

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among the English population. In the journal kept during his captivity, William Russell
recalled how wives of the seamen came aboard his ship upon its arrival in port anxious to
have a look at the Americans. Upon hearing the news that there were American prisoners
on board, these women peppered the crew with questions: “What sort of people are
they?” ‘Are they white?’ ‘Can they talk?’ Upon being pointed to where some stood,
‘Why,’ exclaimed they, ‘they look like our people and they talk English.” The realization
that Americans were not vastly different from themselves led a great many people within
the English population to seek out ways to provide for the welfare of Americans held in
English jails.\(^{32}\)

Falling under the purview of the Commission for Sick and Hurt Seamen (CSHS),
a commission created by the Lords of the Admiralty during the seventeenth century to
care for wounded and captured seamen, more precautions were taken at these two English
prisons for the health and welfare of their occupants than in any other place or at any
other point in the confinement of Americans during the Revolution. Prisoners were
granted hammocks, blankets, and pillows upon their arrival and assigned to dormitory-
like rooms that were several hundred square feet in size. Additionally, there was an
annual clothing ration allotted to the prisoners, as well as access to soap and water to
clean both their clothing and themselves. Food rations, although scarce, could be
supplemented with goods purchased at open markets that were held at the prison gates
every day from ten to three. Local farmers and merchants came to the prison to sell or

\(^{32}\)Sheldon S. Cohen, *Yankee Sailors in British Gaols: Prisoners of War at Forton and Mill, 1777-1783.*
Maritime Prisoners in the Revolutionary War,* 43.
trade goods. To acquire these goods, prisoners manufactured spoons, boxes, chair, and even tables that they could use in trade. Additionally, prison officials occasionally allowed charity boxes to be placed outside the prison or for prisoners to solicit visitors for charity. Gifts of money from any source were allowed to reach the prisoners, even if they were sent from America.33

Despite these amenities, both Forton and Mill were still prisons. Disease remained a constant threat, even with the sanitation measures implemented by British officials. Numerous prison officials, as one historian has noted, “demonstrated the petty officiousness that marked the lower echelons of the eighteenth-century British bureaucracy.” For those prisoners who violated prison regulations, the already small rations would be cut in half, and for more serious infractions, the “black hole” was used as punishment. The “black hole” was small room that lay under the basement floor in both Mill and Forton. Those who violated prison rules could languish there for as long as six weeks. The unsavory conditions in these prisons is further underscored by the willingness of a number of prisoners to petition to join the Royal Navy. Physical conditions in the prison and the psychological distress these prisoners experienced when they learned of American defeats in the war led some American prisoners to defect. Additionally, numerous escape attempts, which met with varying levels of success and carried the possibility of banishment to the “black hole,” were perpetrated throughout the

The conditions faced by Americans held in North America were far more dire than those of Forton and Mill Prisons.\textsuperscript{34}

In the earliest years of the Revolution those captured by the British in North America were held in warehouses and abandoned buildings, which served as makeshift prisons for the American prisoners. The British occupation of New York altered conditions for American prisoners as prison ships in Brooklyn’s Wallabout Bay replaced the temporary prisons. The prison ships fundamentally altered the nature of captivity for Americans. While those prisoners who had been sent to prisons in England or Canada faced a death rate generally of about five percent, those sent to the prison ships in New York faced a rate ten times higher. The conditions and lack of proper medical attention aboard these ship ships led to a death rate of forty-seven percent. These brutal conditions on board the prison ships served to ignite widespread debate over British treatment of American prisoners in 1781. That year the Continental Congress began a series of hearings based on repeated accusations of unbearable conditions aboard the prison ships in New York.\textsuperscript{35}

The \textit{Jersey}, which became the focus of the Congressional investigation, was the most notorious of the British prison ships. The \textit{Jersey} first arrived in New York as a troop transport in the summer of 1776. Initially serving as a storage and hospital ship, the \textit{Jersey} was drafted into service as a prison vessel after two existing prison ships were destroyed by fire in the winter of 1779-1780. Once the \textit{Jersey} was designated a prison

\textsuperscript{34} Cohen, \textit{Yankee Sailors in British Gaols}, 65.
\textsuperscript{35} These numbers are based on Cogliano, \textit{American Military Prisoners in the Revolutionary War}, 149-150, and Howard Peckham, \textit{The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 131-133. It is estimated that more that 11,000 prisoners died on the \textit{Jersey} alone.
vessel, it became little more than a floating hulk. Its interior was gutted and its mast removed, the rudder was unhung and the guns were reallocated to other ships. To prevent escape attempts, the portholes were replaced by a series of twenty-inch wide holes covered with bars to allow for some light and air to reach the interior of the ship. The amenities of the ship were few to begin with, and following this conversion, any amenities that had once existed were stripped away.  

The Congressional investigation began with the testimony of George Batterman of Rhode Island. Batterman had been taken captive while traveling as a civilian passenger on a privateer vessel. In his testimony to Congress, Batterman described the brutal conditions, including overcrowding, disease, and hunger, endured by those help captive on the prison ships. While Batterman had himself been a prisoner on the *Jersey* for only a brief period, he charged that the British “have taken this method of starving us for the want of water to kill us or make us enter into the service. They never allow a man that is sick to go to the hospital ship till they are weak and low, that they often expire before they get out of the ship.” Based on Batterman’s testimony, as well as other reports of mistreatment, Congress, retreating from their earlier stance that American held prisoners receive humane treatment, ordered that “British prisoners receive the same allowance and treatment; in every respect, as our people, who are prisoners, receive from the enemy.” Batterman’s testimony, which appeared in newspapers throughout the United States, only added to the to the growing public concern over the treatment of American prisoners at the hands of the British. Sensing the utility of the Congressional

hearings to support his case, Washington continued to press British authorities to improve the conditions for American prisoners.\footnote{The Pennsylvania Packet or General Advertiser 16 January 1781; see also The American Journal and General Advertiser 7 February 1781; The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser 8 February 1781; The New York Gazette and The Weekly Mercury 12 February 1781. In addition to the newspaper accounts the captivity narratives of John Dodge and Ethan Allen were published in stand alone volumes in 1779 with several subsequent reprints in the following years. George Washington to Marriot Arbuthnot 25 January 1781; Washington to Marriot Arbuthnot 21 August 1781; Washington to Robert Digby 5 June 1782. Also see reports in New York Gazette 12 February 1781.}

As they had throughout the war, the British responded that reports of mistreatment were scurrilous and that Batterman’s allegations were “not founded on matters of fact, but merely calculated to deceive the world into a belief of the necessity of using our people that fall into their hands ill, and inflame the minds of those already crowded by such impressions.” Leading the British efforts to counter the reports of prisoner mistreatment was David Sproat, Commissary General for Naval Prisoners in North America. Sproat was quick to respond to American charges of mistreatment. He noted that he had boarded the prison ships himself in an effort to assure that each resident of the ship received “the full quantity of good, sound, wholesome provisions.” Beyond that, Sproat argued, from the day of his appointment as Commissary General he had worked with British officials to outfit the prison ships to make them as comfortable as possible for those on board. He highlighted the acquisition of “two excellent large stoves” to provide heat for the prisoners during the cold winter months. Additionally, on the hospital ships, he argued that “every sick or wounded person [was] furnished with a cradle, bedding, and surgeons appointed to take care of them.” Beyond refuting American accusations, Sproat charged that it was the Americans who were mistreating prisoners. He noted that British soldiers taken captive by American forces had been...
“thrown into jail and shackled with heavy irons,” that loyalists had fled the country for fear of being “thrown into a dungeon and there treated with every species of insult, outrage, and cruelties,” and that prisoners held in Pennsylvania, had been fed on bread and water “when meat was plenty.” All of this occurred, he noted, “under the nose of the very people” who had accused the British of mistreating American prisoners. Most importantly, Sproat concluded, he had tried repeatedly to establish a prisoner exchange, so as to bring an end to the suffering of “the poor prisoners on both sides in distress.” According to Sproat if there was anyone to blame for the suffering of both English and American prisoners it was those who supported the cause of American independence.38

Sproat’s defense of British prison policies was only one aspect of the British effort to refute American charges. In the face of the Congressional hearings, British military officials launched an official enquiry into the conditions on board the Jersey. The inquiry, conducted by four British officers, focused specifically on the treatment of prisoners and the administration of provisions. In reference to the treatment of the prisoners, the officers found little on the ship that could be considered the fault of the British jailers; in fact, their conclusions suggested that the prisoners had their own poor hygiene to blame for the conditions on the Jersey.39 The conclusion of the British officers was backed by the testimony of six Jersey prisoners. These men, “being the oldest prisoners in [British] possession . . . collectively and voluntarily” declared that “they firmly believed their situation was made at all times as comfortable as possible, and that they were in no instance oppressed or ill-treated.” Beyond the living conditions, the

38 The New York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury (NY), February 12, 1781.
39 Cogliano, American Maritime Prisoners in the Revolutionary War, 160.
prisoners noted that the regularly received sixty-six ounces of bread, forty-three ounces of beef, twenty-two ounces of pork, eight ounces of butter, one pint of pease and two pints of oatmeal. The prisoners concluded “their general testimony with an affirmation that they have never been and are not now crowded in the prison ship.”

In addition to the testimony of the “oldest” of the Jersey’s prisoners, a number of British officers in charge of the oversight of the prison ships offered sworn testimony that they had done their best to offer the captives reasonable living conditions. Jeremiah Downer, a “mariner, a native of Boston, in New England,” noted that during his time as commander of “his Majesty’s prison ship Strombolo, in the harbour of New York . . . the provisions issued to the prisoners confined on board, were of the same goodness and quality as those issued to the seaman belonging to the Stombolo, and the same as that time were issued to the seaman in the Royal Navy.” Peter Robertson, “acting Purser of his Majesty’s prison ship the Jersey” testified that all provisions issued to those on board the prison ships “have always been the same in goodness and quality as were supplied to the crews of his Majesty’s said hospital ship and the other King’s ships on the North-American station during said period.” Finally, Admiral Mariot Arbuthnot, swore an oath that he “uniformly ordered provisions to be issued to the naval prisoners of the same kind, species, goodness and quality as at the same times were furnished to the Royal Navy.”

Just as the members of the Continental Congress had made sure that the proceedings dealing with the experience of American prisoners had found their way into

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40 The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury (NY), February 12, 1781.
41 Ibid.
American newspapers, so too did British officials ensure that Sproat’s letter, as well as the results of the inquiry, and the testimony of the prisoners and the officers were published, if only in the loyalist papers of New York. Interestingly, it was the New York newspapers that presented the most fair and balanced coverage of the debate over the treatment of prisoners. Often providing the arguments of both sides. Despite the more balanced coverage, the veracity of the British claims about the quality of life on the prison ships is dubious, as the forty-seven percent death rate suggests. In all likelihood, the prisoners who offered accounts on behalf of the British assertions were offered their freedom in exchange for their testimony. Regardless of the veracity of the British claims, the fact that the British military went beyond simply denying the charges of prisoner mistreatment and not only commissioned an investigation, but sought out prisoner confirmation of the committees findings, suggests the importance which the British placed on the public perception of their treatment of captives.

The British efforts to refute reports of poor conditions aboard the prison ships met with only limited success as reports of the plight of American prisoners continued to appear in the American press. About two months after the official British enquiry into conditions on the Jersey, in late February of 1781, Patriot papers once again published reports of mistreatment on board the British prison ships. The story reported that thirty-three prisoners had been freed in a prisoner exchange between the American and British

forces. The prisoners, having just been released from the New York prison ships were "in a very sickly and emaciated condition, owing to the inhuman treatment they experienced while with the enemy." The prisoners’ condition and their accounts of the conditions aboard the ships were "beyond description, and, if possible, exceed the enemy’s former refinements in barbarity." The account offered by the Patriot press was a direct attempt to refute much of the counter efforts put forth by the British navy following the Congressional hearings, noting that "the prisoners had repeatedly petitioned the Admiral [Arbuthnot], but their petitions remained unanswered.” With no improvement in their conditions, the prisoners reported that for a lack of water they “were obliged to ally their thirst with urine . . . [and] that latterly about seven or eight die in a day.” Thus, despite British efforts to portray the conditions on the prison ships as adequate, the continuing presence of stories to the contrary undermined their credibility.

As they had in the face of French and Indians attacks in previous generations, the Americans, in focusing on the issue of prisoner mistreatment, sought to depict their enemy as a savage or barbarous “other.” The accounts of prison conditions left little room to doubt the barbarous act of the British in leaving American prisoners to suffer in the hulks of prison ships. 43

As in America, the treatment of American prisoners in England was the subject of some controversy. The contact between American prisoners and British citizens led to startling realizations for some Englishmen. Nathaniel Fanning, an American prisoner held at Forton prison recounted a conversation that he had heard between two curious

43 American Journal (Providence, RI), February 17, 1781; also in Norwich Packet and the Weekly Advertiser (CT), February 20, 1781 and New Jersey Gazette (Elizabethtown), February 21, 1781.
English citizens upon seeing the American captives: “Why Lard, neighbor, these be
white paple [people]; they tauk just as us do, by my trouth; thare’s a paity [pity] such
good looking paple shou’d troused up [hung] by our grate men.” This recognition of
shared appearance and language led many to work to ameliorate conditions of and
provide for the American prisoners in English jails. Established men such as the
Reverend Thomas Wren, Deacon Robert Heath, and mercantile agent Thomas Digges,
took up the cause of these prisoners. These men helped to raise funds for supplies,
promoted efforts to petition the Admiralty, and even facilitated the flow of American
money to help improve the plight of those imprisoned at Mill and Forton. Most notably,
in London, Lord Abingdon argued strenuously against the North Act and announced to
the House of Commons that he intended to promote a subscription on behalf of American
captives.44

Any sympathy to the American cause that founds its way into the English press
was often reprinted in American papers. While it was delayed several months
Parliamentary discussion of the treatment of prisoners in November of 1780 was
republished in the United States in April of 1781. The debate in the House of Commons
centered on the extension of the Habeas Corpus Act, “impowering his Majesty to detain
in prison persons accused of Treason in America, or on the high seas.” While some
members of the House felt that an extension of the act was necessary as “those
circumstances which formed the necessity of such a suspension of the habeas corpus act
last year still existed” that is “the rebellion in America had not yet expired,” others were

44 Memoirs of Nathaniel Fanning, quoted in Cohen, Yankee Sailors in British Gaols, 77-78 and 82-84.
concerned that “a bill vesting such extensive powers in the Crown ought not to pass as a matter of course.” What another member of the House found most disturbing was the fact that none of these prisoners had been brought to trial, “and still more inconsistent, it was the practice to treat persons of this description as prisoners of war” by exchanging them for the release of American-held British prisoners. Although debate of Habeas Corpus Act was eventually tabled, those who supported the cause of Independence could take heart that, as had been the case following the Stamp Act and the Townshend Duties, their cause had found voice in the seat of British authority.45

In publishing their arguments over the treatment of captives, both British and American officials opened the door to larger public participation in a debate over prison conditions and the cause of American independence. In appealing to the “Rights of Humanity,” Washington cleared the way for broad participation in the debate. Whether intentional or not, the efforts by American and British officials to employ a public debate over the treatment of prisoners of war to advance their cause opened the door to a range of voices. This effort to engage the public expanded access to the public sphere in the emerging nation. From the first, Washington had used the debate to help push the cause of American independence, in essence pushing for the creation of a distinct American identity. That was only further developed in the newspapers and captivity narratives that followed. While Washington’s strategy on the field of battle was simply not to lose, his

45 Independent Ledger (Boston, MA), April 9, 1781; American Journal and General Advertiser (Providence, RI), April 11, 1781; Freeman’s Journal (Portsmouth, NH), April 25, 1781.
strategy in the war over the treatment of prisoners could be more aggressive. In the battle for public opinion, the Americans could push for a win.

The debate over the treatment of prisoners was a crucial front in the battle for American independence. By the end of the war, new voices had joined this battle. The captivity narratives of Ethan Allen and John Dodge present a personal vision of the experience of war in which they worked to define themselves and their experience in captivity as the embodiment of what it meant to American—as heroes. The presence of an established American press and the power of public opinion created an environment in which the process of defining the young nation stretched from the highest levels of government to experience of those who found themselves imprisoned by a “barbarous” other. From the earliest days of the move to independence, the definition of what it was to be American included the ability to display fortitude and stand for the “rights of humanity” in the face of a “haughty and cruel” enemy. 46

46See Royster, A Revolutionary People at War, Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America 1500-2000 (New York: Viking, 2005), and Linda Colley, Captives: The Story of Britain’s pursuit of empire and how its soldiers and civilians were held captive by the dream of global supremacy 1600-1850 (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002).
CHAPTER 2

“THE OBLIGATIONS OF EVERY GOVERNMENT”: THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS, PUBLIC OPINION, AND AMERICAN CAPTIVES IN ALGIERS 1783-1787

In May of 1785 newspapers throughout the United States published a letter demanding tribute of “one hundred thousand pounds of their money, thirty thousand pounds of their most costly manufactures, and forty of their most beautiful and virtuous damsels, not under 12, nor above 18, descended from honest parents, free from mole, blemish, or latent imperfection.” The letter was signed by “Al Koraschi Ebnallad, sovereign and supreme Dey of Algiers, Lord of the Algerine territories and the Atlantic Ocean.” According to the Dey, the Americans having withdrawn “from a subjugation to their masters,” the English, were now obligated to provide for the protection of their own ships traveling along Mediterranean trade routes. If the Americans failed to deliver the requisite tribute, the Dey threatened, he would “let loose [his] corsairs upon them.” Despite the publicized threat, the American government failed to reach terms with the North African nation and soon found themselves at war. Within three months of the publication of the Dey’s letter, two American ships, the Maria and the Dauphin, carrying a total of twenty-one crewmen, fell prey to Algerian corsairs. These captured Americans
were carried to Algiers and sold into slavery until sufficient funds could be raised to purchase their freedom.  

The capture of American sailors and their subsequent enslavement in Algiers highlighted the vulnerable position of the new United States in the Atlantic world. Rather than celebrating the freedom from English tyranny, Americans were faced with the harsh realities of independence and the loss of the protection of the English navy. While a post war economic downturn and domestic disturbances, such as Shays’s Rebellion, are often highlighted as the major concerns in pushing the United States to replace the Articles of Confederation an examination of the Barbary threat helps illustrate the importance of international concerns in the move to create a new national government. The failure of the Continental Congress to secure the release of the twenty-one American sailors held in North Africa sparked a resurgence in the interest of the American people in national and international affairs.

Despite the significance of the conflict with Algiers few historians have given sufficient attention to the impact that this crisis had on the formation of American politics and society. In the years following the Revolution Congress not only lacked the resources to achieve much in the realm of foreign policy, but also the political support to do anything about it. The crisis in Algiers changed that. Faced with the sale of American sailors into slavery, Americans began to realize the scope of the international challenges facing the nation. In following the fate of the American captives in Algiers, Americans

47 Connecticut Gazette (New London), May 13, 1785; see also State Gazette of South Carolina (Charleston), May 26, 1785; Connecticut Courant (Hartford), May 16, 1785; Essex Journal (Newburyport, MA), May 25, 1785; Vermont Journal (Windsor, VT) May 31, 1785. There is some question as to the authenticity of the letter, however, regardless of the authorship, the unsettling nature of the letter and its widespread republication suggest the significance of its impact.
also came to recognize the underdeveloped nature of the national economy, the lack of respect for the United States shown by European nations, and the inability of the United States government to protect the liberty of its citizens. The crisis in Algiers brought the flaws of the Confederation government and the importance of international relations in to sharp focus and made clear the need for reform at the national level if Americans were to realize the promise of the Revolution.48

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The failure on the part of Congress to protect the liberty of its citizens abroad forced many to reexamine the place and importance of the federal government. The Articles of Confederation, which outlined the powers of the federal government in the years following the Revolution, had been created as a wartime measure and limited the

The ability of the Continental Congress to effectively lead the nation. During the Revolution, faced with the realities of a military conflict with England, there was general agreement that a federal government was needed to deal with issues of national defense and foreign relations. There was also general agreement that a federal government might serve to manage the western lands of the United States. Beyond these issues, however, the various states could not agree which powers ought to be granted a national government and which powers ought to be reserved to the states. With these differences in mind, the first national government of the United States was intentionally limited to secure a quick ratification so that this new government might secure foreign aid in the cause of independence.

Styled as a “firm league of friendship,” the Articles allowed each state to retain “its sovereignty, freedom, and independence,” leaving power firmly rooted in the state rather than national government. More importantly, the power to tax was left to the “authority and direction of the legislatures of the several States.” Even before the Articles took effect the inherent inability of Congress to raise revenue left the federal government nearly powerless to achieve its goals. The challenges faced by Congress only expanded when, following the conclusion of the war, many Americans left the world of national and international politics behind and returned to the rhythms of ordinary life.

As Americans turned away from national issues, Congress increasingly came to be seen as irrelevant. Citizens paid little attention to the struggles of the federal

government, correctly recognizing that in the young United States the state legislatures were the true seats of power—due in large part to their ability to tax. Yet with many Americans focused elsewhere, international issues became increasingly problematic. The loss of British markets contributed to the downturn in the American economy and forced American merchants to seek out new trading partners. The poor state of the American economy only made the task of establishing new trading relationships more difficult. On the western frontier, the British continued to occupy strategic forts and in 1784, the Spanish government, who controlled the Louisiana territory, denied Americans access to the Mississippi waterway.  

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The North African states of Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and Morocco, which Europeans collectively referred to as the “Barbary States,” first came into existence with the spread of Islam across the northern African coast and into the Iberian Peninsula from the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century. Over the following eight centuries, these small states on the edges of the Mediterranean world employed a mix of trade and piracy (or privateering) to sustain their economies. Following religious dictate, these privateers sailed against Christian nations who failed to negotiate a treaty with the Barbary states. Once captured these Christians were sold into slavery in the Muslim nations. By the late fifteenth century, however, with the success of the Spanish efforts to expel Islamic power from the Iberian Peninsula in the Reconquista, these small states found themselves facing the wrath of the emerging Spanish Empire. Faced with harsh economic regulations

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imposed by the Spanish, the privateering efforts came to dominate the economy of these states. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Barbary states of North Africa fell under the control of the expanding Ottoman Empire.\footnote{Morocco was the one exception, the Moroccan people maintained their independence from the Ottoman Empire throughout the period under consideration.} Saddled with the tribute demands of the Turks, raiding European coastal towns and seizing European vessels in the Mediterranean quickly became the heart of North African economy. For the Barbary States, seizing the ships of “infidels” became their best means of survival.\footnote{Parker, \textit{Uncle Sam in Barbary}; Lambert, \textit{The Barbary Wars}; Michael Kitzen, \textit{Tripoli and the United States at War}(London: McFarland and Co., 1993); Linda Colley, \textit{Captives: The Story of Britain’s pursuit of empire and how its soldiers and civilians were held captive by the dream of global supremacy, 1600-1850} (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002) and Robert C. Davis, \textit{Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800} (New York: Palgrave, 2003).}

Although commonly referred to as “pirates” the Barbary ships might more properly be referred to as “privateers” or “corsairs.” While many of these ships were privately held, they operated with the sanction of the Barbary governments, lending a legitimacy to their activity that the term pirate denies them. The practice of privateering, a method employed by the United States throughout the American Revolution, was recognized by states throughout the world as legal until 1856, when it was abolished under the Declaration of Paris. It was on this premise that the Barbary States, primarily Algeria and Morocco, sailed the Mediterranean in search of wealth. These states considered themselves free to attack any state with whom no treaty existed or any state which they deemed to be in violation of an existing treaty. Following these practices, the Barbary corsairs, which at their peak numbered around one hundred fifty, struck at European ships in the Mediterranean throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These corsair raids supplied the Barbary States with both treasure and captives. The
treasure was split between the crew and the Barbary governments, while captive crewmen found themselves on the auction block, sold into slavery throughout North Africa. Captives with few skills were often put to work in the quarries or shipyards. Seamen trained in a trade often found themselves in cities working at their craft. If sailors converted to Islam, they were often allowed to return to sea aboard the Barbary corsairs. Officers on the captured vessels were often placed on parole, reflecting similar European practices, provided they pay a monthly fee for their limited freedom. Often times, a foreign consul would be required to provide a surety and if the officers fled, the consul would be held financially responsible. 54

Under this system, the city of Algiers grew into one of the most prominent cities in the Mediterranean, with a population nearing a hundred thousand, larger than Genoa, Marseilles, or Barcelona. The success of the Barbary corsairs was not unchecked, however. In the later half of the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, the British and Dutch fleets were sent to the Mediterranean to stand against the Barbary threat. Although, both England and the Netherlands continued to pay tribute to the North African states, it was out of convenience rather than due to an inability to destroy the Barbary corsairs. For the European powers, the threat of the Barbary States was best managed through a series of yearly tributes to maintain safe passage for their ships. While the British Navy was more than a match for the Algerian forces, Algerian harassment of British enemies made an annual payment the most effective means for dealing with these North African nations. Thus, by the time the United States achieved

54 Parker, Uncle Sam in Barbary, 6.
its independence, the power of the Barbary States was on the wane. The declining status of these states made them that much more dangerous to the United States. With neither the money nor the naval force to challenge the Barbary States, the United States found itself in a vulnerable position.  

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The first incident involving the United States and the nations of the Barbary Coast occurred when the American ship *Betsey* was seized by a Moroccan corsair in 1784. The Moroccan action, despite appearances, was not an act of war, rather it was an effort to facilitate diplomatic relations between the United States and Morocco. During the Revolution the Moroccan sultan was among the first to recognize American independence. Morocco had begun to receive American vessels in port two months before the French established diplomatic relations with the United States in 1777 and had granted American ships most-favored-nation status. Despite this relationship, the new American government had failed to negotiate a formal treaty with Morocco and by 1784, frustrated with a lack of American response, the sultan had ordered the seizure of an American ship. Once the sultan had Congress’s attention, he informed them that neither the crew, nor the cargo aboard the *Betsey* was to be sold and that once a treaty had been negotiated the ship would be released. 

The subsequent conflict with Algiers was not so easily resolved. When Algerian corsairs seized the *Maria* and the *Dauphin* in the late summer of 1785, the vessels and their crew were seized as prisoners of war. These ships and their crews shared none of

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55 Lambert, *The Barbary Wars*, 34.
56 Parker, *Uncle Sam in Barbary*, 40.
the protection which the sultan of Morocco had offered the crewmen aboard the Betsey. Although relations with Morocco were resolved with relative ease, the crisis in Algiers was a formidable challenge to the United States. Most significant among these challenges was that the capture of American sailors represented a direct threat to American liberty. The unsettling news that Americans had been sold into slavery forced many Americans to question their security. In an era when Americans were becoming ever more aware of the responsibilities of government and the obligations of social compact, the newly independent states found themselves unable to fulfill their obligation to secure the freedom and protect the liberties of the sailors taken captive and sold into slavery in North Africa. The crisis in Algiers forced many Americans to recognize the need for an effective federal government.

Without an established representative in Algiers, the American sailors found themselves relying on the British consul for aid and watched as English citizens, who had been mistaken as Americans, were released according to the terms of the British treaty with the dey of Algiers. For the American sailors in Algiers, American independence from England prevented them from gaining their freedom. As one of the American sailors observed they had become “victims of independence.” The crisis awakened many Americans to the challenges facing the new nation on the international level and made them aware of the need for a functioning national government. The capture of the American sailors made clear that independence from England was not enough to secure American liberty. As Congress found itself unable to redeem the crewmen of the Maria and Dauphin, an increasing number of voices joined the debate surrounding how best to
protect Americans in the larger world. The plight of these sailors represented a failure of
the promise of the American Revolution—these sailors had been deprived of the very
thing for which Americans had fought, their liberty. As the story of the American sailors
in Algiers continued to spread, the people of the United States came face to face with the
fundamental flaw of a limited national government.\textsuperscript{57}

From the first, John Jay, the United States secretary for foreign affairs and
proponent of a stronger national government, recognized the political utility of the
Algerian crisis. Writing to Richard Henry Lee, President of the Continental Congress,
Jay remarked that the seizure of American sailors "does not strike me as a great evil. The
more we are ill-treated abroad the more we shall unite and consolidate at home." As Jay
foresaw, the seizure of American sailors contributed to the growing concern about the
limits of the Articles of Confederation. The conflict with Algiers offered Americans a
clear example of how a weak central government could lead to a loss of liberty rather
than to its preservation.\textsuperscript{58}

As early as the Spring of 1784, the Continental Congress commissioned Benjamin
Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams as “ministers plenipotentiary” to negotiate
with Morocco and Algiers. From their posts in Europe the American ministers
plenipotentiary were authorized to dispatch agents to establish diplomatic relations with
Morocco and Algiers and secure free passage for American ships. From the first,
Jefferson indicated little faith that their efforts would succeed. In dealing with the

\textsuperscript{57} Falmouth Gazette \textit{(ME)}, October 25, 1785; Continental Journal \textit{(New Haven)}, October 27, 1785;
Providence Gazette \textit{(RI)}, October 29, 1785; Connecticut Courant \textit{(Hartford)}, October 31, 1785; and
Connecticut Journal \textit{(New Haven)}, November 2, 1785; James Cathcart, Cathcart Family Papers, New York
Public Library, Box 1.

\textsuperscript{58} John Jay to the President of Congress (Richard Henry Lee), 13 October 1785, Jay Papers.
European powers, it had become all too clear to Jefferson that the United States had little standing on the international stage and that such a position left them hard pressed in their negotiations in North Africa. The “American reputation in Europe is not much to be flattering to its citizens,” he observed. “Two circumstances are particularly objected to us, the nonpayment of our debts, and the want of energy in our government.” The failures in both of these areas “discourage a connection with us.”

Jefferson feeling that the disdain from European nations would only be amplified in negotiations with the Barbary States suggested a military solution to the issue. Such a strategy, however, placed him at odds with Adams. Jefferson argued that the United States would best be served by standing up to the Barbary States and refusing to pay any tribute. “I was very unwilling,” he reported “that we should acquiesce in the European humiliation of paying tribute to those lawless pirates, and endeavored to form an association of the powers subject to the habitual depredation from them.” When Jefferson presented his proposal to the ambassadors of other European nations at court in Paris—Portugal, Naples, the two Sicilies, Venice, Malta, Denmark and Sweden—all were apparently favorably disposed to such an association. Despite their interest, however, these states feared that France and England “would interfere, and, either openly or secretly support the Barbary powers,” and defeat such a coalition. Additionally, when news of a new treaty between Spain and the Barbary States became public, the nations

which had initially supported Jefferson’s plan withdrew. With the loss of any European support, Jefferson reported that “it fell through.”

Even without European support, or possibly because of the lack of support, Jefferson continued to believe that the best course of action was to refuse any demand for tribute. Jefferson argued that the United States ought to stand firm and unlike the European powers, which paid tribute to secure safe passage in the Mediterranean, establish safe passage “by war.” Such an action, Jefferson argued “will procure us respect in Europe . . . and I think it the least expensive.” Jefferson argued that the only way to ensure safe passage in the Mediterranean for American ships was the creation of an American navy that could destroy the corsairs of the Barbary States.

John Adams, however, argued that Jefferson’s visions would spell disaster for the young United States. “We ought not fight them at all, unless we determine to fight them forever,” Adams argued. “This thought is I fear, too rugged for our People to bear. To fight them at the Expence of Millions, and to make Peace after all by giving them more Money and larger Presents than would now procure perpetual Peace Seems not to be Economical.” For Adams, two powerful reasons recommended negotiation over armed conflict. First, the American people, having recently suffered through the American Revolution were in no condition to undertake another war. Second, the cost of a war would be far greater than any thing the United States government could afford, even if the government would have to struggle to pay the cost of any negotiated tribute.

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60 From the autobiography of Thomas Jefferson in the Jefferson papers online.
As American officials debated the best course of action, American sailors trading in the Mediterranean were left exposed to attacks by Barbary corsairs. In the face of this threat, American ships attempted to hide their port of origin from would-be captors. In the summer of 1785, the *Connecticut Journal* reported that “several American trading vessels [have] lately eluded the rovers from Algiers, by hoisting English colours.” With the looming threat of the Barbary corsairs, American sailors found independence from England to be a hindrance to their freedom on the seas rather than a help. While this tactic was successful at first, before long, the Algerian ships began to stop any vessel bearing the Union Jack and demand to see proof of their port of registry. The threat of capture soon became all too real when, having officially declared war on the United States, Algerian corsairs seized two American ships, the *Maria* of Boston and the *Dauphin* of Philadelphia, off the coast of the Iberian Peninsula in the summer of 1785.63

By autumn of that year, a letter from a merchant in the Mediterranean, published throughout New England, announced that “A Brig from Boston to this place; laden with flour and lumber, has . . . been carried to Algiers.” Before long, news of the capture spread as far as South Carolina, where the reports of Americans sailors in captivity were deemed “alarming.” Reports of the conditions in Algiers came from the prisoners themselves. These letters made their way to the United States by way of Richard Harrison, the American Consul at Cadiz, Spain. Harrison, following the requests of the captive sailors passed these letters along to the Continental Congress and to numerous American newspapers. The first letter he sent back to the United States included an

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introduction which stated that the communication was “of so interesting a nature, that the printers are all requested to republish it.” The letter, signed by the captains of the captured ships, Richard O’Bryan and Isaac Stephens, began by reminding all who read it that the prisoners held in Algiers were “the subjects of the United States of America” and that they had been “left in a state of slavery and misery, the severities of which are beyond your imagination.” The notion that Americans could be sold into slavery ran contrary to the principles of the Revolution: These American sailors had been deprived of the very thing for which the Revolution had been fought, their liberty. Furthermore, the captives were quick to point out, “if we do not make some terms, our trade is ruined.” The American sailors in Algiers recognized that by linking their fate to the fate of American economy, their calls for redemption might have an even greater impact. In closing, the captive Americans noted that they hoped their story of suffering and the threat to the economy would serve “as warning to all Americans” about how vulnerable their liberties were.  

There could be little question that the Mediterranean was vital to American trade and to visions of an American trade network. Thomas Jefferson estimated that prior to the Revolution the Mediterranean had been a market for “one sixth of their wheat and flour, and one fourth of their dried and pickled fish.” Thomas Barclay, the United States Consul General at Paris, wrote in 1786 that the Mediterranean trade was “absolutely

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64 *Falmouth Gazette* (ME), October 25, 1785; *Continental Journal* (Boston, MA), October 27, 1785; *Providence Gazette* (RI), October 29, 1785; *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), October 31, 1785; *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), November 2, 1785; *State Gazette of South Carolina* (Charleston), November 3, 1785; *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), November 28, 1785; *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), November 23, 1785; *Middlesex Gazette* (Middletown, CT), November 29, 1785; *Essex Journal* (Newburyport, MA), December 30, 1785; *Massachusetts Spy or Worcester Gazette*, December 6, 1785.
essential to the commerce of our country.” The Mediterranean trade was especially critical given that American ships, following the Revolution, had been limited in their participation in the European trade networks, due largely to British efforts to limit the trade of the United States. Although American consumers resumed the importation of British goods almost immediately after the conclusion of the American Revolution, the United States found itself excluded from the “interdependent multilateral trading system” that crisscrossed the Atlantic between North America, the West Indies, and Europe. The New York Chamber of Commerce observed that “all Europe did indeed desire to see us independent; but now that we are become so, each separate power is desirous of rendering our interests subservient to their commercial policy.” Prior to the Revolution, much of American trade was directed to supplying British interests in the West Indies with food stuff, with the British closure of this market and much of the rest of Europe to American goods the Mediterranean market was one of the few readily accessible to American ships.65

Faced with the Algerian threat in the Mediterranean, John Jay recommended that Congress encourage “the American merchants who traffic in Spain, Portugal, the Mediterranean and to the Madeiras and Canaries, to employ none but Vessels well armed and manned.” Despite Jay’s warning, Congress was unable to offer much in the way of protection because the United States sold off its naval vessels following the Revolution.

With the Barbary threat to American ships, crews were hard to come by and insurance rates for American ships sailing in the Atlantic more than doubled. Rufus King, a member of the Continental Congress, noted that “it is difficult to persuade our seamen to navigate unarmed vessels on those seas where Barbary corsairs cruise.” The consequence of which was that American merchants had turned away from American vessels and had begun to “charter foreign vessels which are protected from the Barbary cruisers to carry our produce to market.” As news of the crisis spread, the realities of the post-Revolutionary economy were driven home. Even as the deficiencies of the domestic economic policies of the state legislatures was becoming increasingly clear, the loss of another market to American goods could only serve to deepen the economic recession faced by the new nation.⁶⁶

Despite the direct impact of the crisis in Algiers on the American economy, members of Congress found themselves unable to act. The weak American economy and the lack of funding, due to the inability of the federal government to levy taxes, left Congress without much recourse. Any attempt to negotiate for the release of the hostages might have encouraged further seizures of American vessels and driven up ransom demands, thus making American ships all the more vulnerable. Faced with a seemingly unresponsive government, the American captives were forced to rely on foreign powers for assistance. Such circumstances only served to diminish the reputation of the United States among foreign powers.

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Without a representative in Algiers, the captive American sailors turned to the English consul Charles Logie. Logie, whose father had been the Swedish consul in Algiers a half century before, began his career in the British navy before being named British consul general in Tangiers, Morocco from 1772 to 1782. After leaving Morocco in 1782, Logie was named as British consul to Algiers in 1785. The British Consul’s experience and family connection to the region seemed to make him the perfect candidate to serve in the Barbary states. Most significantly, Logie was one of the few European representatives who could speak with Barbary leaders without an interpreter. With his understanding of the region and language ability, Logie was able to secure the parole of the officers of the captive American ships and it was with Logie’s assistance that Captain Richard O’Brian of the Dauphin, Captain Isaac Stephens of the Maria, and Captain Zachariah Coffin, who had been a passenger aboard the Dauphin, were able to send their first letters back to the United States. The three officers encouraged those working to secure their freedom to “write to the British Consul on the subject,” as they were sure “he would be glad to give you every information relating to us, and how matters may be accommodated with America.” Faced with the seizure of American ships, Americans were forced to look to the English for assistance.  

While the American officers take captive in Algiers sought to aid Americans who might be working for their release, several of the crewmen who face the harsh conditions of the Algerian quarries went a step further. Eleven of those aboard the Dauphin and

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Maria claimed British citizenship and, working closely with Logie, petitioned King George III of England to intervene on their behalf. These eleven crewmen claimed to be “his Majestys subjects Taken under American colours and at present miserable slaver at Algiers” who had been “captured in the Month of July 1785 On Board the ship Dauphin of Philadelphia. . . and Schooner Maria of Boston.”68 All eleven crewmembers claimed to have been “obliged” to serve under American colors by circumstances beyond their control. Despite their claims and Logie’s assistance the British government failed to secure the release of these prisoners.69

Whatever the veracity of the claims of these eleven crewmen, they had good reason to at least attempt to establish themselves as British citizens. While Americans were feeling their way through diplomatic relations with the North African States, the European governments had been redeeming captives for generations. In the spring of 1786, a group of English citizens captured while traveling on a Portuguese ship and initially forced to “obliged to work very hard for the first two months of their captivity,” yet, apparently possessing better proof of citizenship than those aboard the Maria and Dauphin, were eventually released “on making it known that they were subjects of England.” Other European captives found relief in the form of the Mathurins. This religious order, formally known as the Order of the Holy Trinity and Redemption of Captives, had been formed in the twelfth-century to ease the plight and negotiate the redemption of Christian captives sold into slavery in North Africa. American newspapers

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68 Petition 20 December 1785 from the Public Record Office at Kew, England (FO 3/6, pp. 172-173) in Parker, Uncle Sam in Barbary, 220-221.
69 Three of these eleven captives eventually redeemed by friends (who were later reimbursed by the U.S. government), four died in captivity, and the other four were ultimately redeemed through American efforts. See Parker, Uncle Sam in Barbary, 222.
reported on these efforts noting that in 1785 “313 French captives” had been “redeemed this year from Algiers, by the Mathurins and the Fathers de la Mercy.” The redemption of these 313 captives stood in stark contrast to the efforts of the American government.70

While their efforts had not met with the success of the Mathurins, the American government had begun their own efforts to redeem the American captives. As early as the Spring of 1785, Congress had authorized a limited fund to establish peace with the dey and dispatched John Lamb of Connecticut to bring an end to the crisis. Lamb had been recommended to Congress for this mission by the lieutenant governor of Connecticut, Samuel Huntington. Huntington noted that “Lamb is a Gentleman of Fidelity and Mercantile knowledge,” and that he was “well acquainted” with the Barbary Coast, “having made several voyages to those parts before the late war.” With this recommendation, Congress authorized Lamb to travel to Algiers to serve as the American representative in the negotiations. By the early spring of 1786, news had reached the American captives informing them that they would soon “see one of our countrymen negotiating the peace here.”71

Even as Lamb’s arrival in Algiers marked a moment of hope for the captives, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson reported back to Congress that their own

70New York Packet (NY), April 3, 1786; Pennsylvania Packet (Philadelphia), April 10, 1786; Carlisle Gazette (PA), April 19, 1786; Maryland Chronicle or the Universal Advertiser (Fredericktown), May 10, 1786. New York Journal (NY), February 9, 1786; Independent Gazetteer (New York, NY), February 18, 1786; Massachusetts Gazette (Boston), February 27, 1786; Essex Journal (Newburyport, MA), March 1, 1786; Charleston Evening Gazette (SC), March 28, 1786. Michael Kitzen, Tripoli and the United States at War (London: McFarland and Co., 1993).
71Samuel Huntington to John Jay, 10 January 1785, The Jay Papers. Independent Gazetteer (New York, NY), May 27, 1786; Columbian Herald or the Patriotic Courier of North America (Charleston, SC), June 15, 1786; Charleston Evening Gazette (SC), June 16, 1786.
communications with the Algerian ambassador in Paris suggested Lamb faced an uphill battle in his negotiations:

We took the liberty to make some inquiries concerning the grounds of their pretensions to make war upon nations who had done them no injury. . . . The Ambassador answered us that it was founded on the laws of their Prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have acknowledged their authority were sinners, that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners and the every Musselman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.  

The Algerian ambassador went on to inform Adams and Jefferson that the first member of the corsair crew to board the captive vessel was rewarded with an extra slave and that as the corsairs approached another vessel “it was the practice . . . for each sailor to take a dagger in each hand and another in his mouth and leap upon board which terrorized their enemies that very few ever stood against them.” Following this conversation, Adams and Jefferson were both convinced that the cost of redeeming the American captives would be far greater than they had initially anticipated. The two commissioners expected that the demand might be so great, that there was “but one possible way that we know of to procure the money, if Congress should authorize [them] to go to the necessary expense and . . . borrow it in Holland.”

Lamb, traveling from Barcelona, arrived in Algiers on an American owned ship flying a Spanish flag in March of 1786. When he was finally received by the dey, Adams’ and Jefferson’s fears were realized when, faced with Lamb’s offer, the dey “would not speak of peace.” In the face of this resistance Lamb sought the aid of the European consuls in Algiers. While Lamb reported that he had received assistance from

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73 Ibid.
both the French and Spanish consuls, it was the English consul who provided Lamb with the greatest support. Logie received Lamb “as an old friend and Declared to me that he had no orders to counter act my mission from his court.” Furthermore, Richard O’Brien reported that Lamb lodged with Logie during part of his time in Algiers. Despite the assistance of foreign consuls, Lamb knew that he would require a great deal more money to redeem the captives and achieve peace with Algiers. Having met the with the dey on several occasions, Lamb left Algiers in May of 1786 ostensibly to secure the necessary funds to purchase the freedom of the American sailors and establish peace between the United States and Algiers.74

News of Lamb’s efforts reached the American press later that summer. These reports stated that Lamb had gained audience with the dey, “but to no purpose; more money must be had than is yet allowed by Congress to effectuate peace and you may depend that the Algerines will cruise against us.” Such news must have been frustrating to those following the events. Despite the efforts of Congress and the American commissioners, American sailors were still held in Algiers and the seas remained unsafe for American travel. Unease over events in Algiers manifest as critiques of Lamb. The American captives at Algiers found Lamb to be a less than satisfactory negotiator, Richard O’Brien noted in a letter home that if the job had been left “in the hands of a qualified statesman,” rather than Lamb’s control, the situation would have been much more quickly and easily resolved.75

75 New York Journal or the Weekly Register (NY), August 17, 1786; Middlesex Gazette (Middletown, CT), August 21, 1786. Independent Gazetteer (New York, NY), February 5, 1787; New York Packet (NY),
As letters questioning Lamb’s ability began to appear in American papers, the American diplomat did not go undefended. A letter from “Centinel” appeared in the Massachusetts Gazette defending and attacking his critics. Centinel questioned the authenticity of the letter which had “appeared (under the Philadelphia head) in some of the papers, said to have been written by a sea Captain, a prisoner at Algiers.” Rather than simply accepting the charges of incompetence against Lamb, Centinel remarked that “a correspondent, who is perfectly well acquainted with that gentleman’s character, wishes the publick opinion may be suspended, until something of more validity than the charge of an anonymous letter-writer is exhibited against him.” Centinel, however, was in the minority. The letter from Algiers was indeed authentic and dissatisfaction with Lamb’s efforts was widespread. 76

As early as May of 1786, Rufus King noted that “everyone wishes the abilities of the country were more adequate to an effectual bribery of these powers than they are & my own wish has always been that the small sum dedicated for these negotiations had been put into abler hands than those of Mr. Lamb.” King’s sentiment seems to reflect that of many of those associated with the crisis in Algiers. It is hard to know for sure whether, given access to greater resources, Lamb would have been able to achieve peace between the United States and Algiers in 1786. Despite the many attacks on his skills as a negotiator the lack of sufficient financial support cannot be discounted as an important factor in the affair. Regardless of the reason, Lamb’s failure represented another failure

February 13, 1787; The New Jersey Journal (Elizabethtown), February 14, 1787; Massachusetts Gazette (Boston), February 20, 1787. 76

The Massachusetts Gazette (Boston), February 23, 1787.
on the part of Congress to fulfill its obligation in protecting the liberty of American citizens abroad. The debate that emerged surrounding Lamb’s efforts was a stand-in for a larger concern about the effectiveness of the American government. In commenting on the plight of the American captives at Algiers a growing segment of the American people were becoming a party to a larger debate about the obligations of the Federal government. Lamb’s failure, as Centinel had observed, played an important role in shaping “publick opinion.” The crisis in Algiers and the widespread news coverage served as a national focal point for American concerns about their security in the years following the Revolution.  

Lamb’s failed efforts also served to highlight the role of the British consul in the region. Charles Logie’s efforts on behalf of the American captives received special notice both in England and in the United States. In an article that initially appeared in the English press and was eventually republished in the United States, it was reported that Logie had “clothed several of the American captives, who were almost naked; and, in behalf of the colonies at large, has used all his interest, though in vain, with the councils of Algiers, respecting the demands for the ransom of American slaves.” Having highlighted the benevolence of the British ambassador and the inability of the United States to take care of its own citizens, the article continued, “a dispute betwixt Great Britain and America . . . cannot be considered as a matter of great consequence to this country. The friends of Americans here may bluster as they please, and talk of retaliation on our shipping, but the Americans themselves well know, that they are not

77 Rufus King to John Adams, 5 May 1786, The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King, 173.
strong enough to retaliate on any nation on earth that possesses a naval power.” The assessment of American vulnerability was not only an indictment of the inability of the United States to inflict damage upon any British interest, but also a comment on the inability of the United States to stand up to the “naval power” of Algiers, a “power” which the English navy could destroy with minimal effort.\(^78\)

News that the British consul had played such a large role in assisting the captives was met with some unease in the United States. New York merchant, David Provoost, questioned the intentions and character of the British consul. Provoost recounted his own travails while trading in North Africa. Provoost reported that one morning, while in Tangiers on business in 1775, he and his two companions were seized by a “troop of Moors” and accused of trespassing. After their capture, Provoost “soon found that we were indebted for this inhuman treatment to Charles Logie, esquire, who at that time resided there, as consul to his Britannic majesty. This man, from a whimsical antipathy he had imbibed in the early stages of the war, against the Americans, determining to vent his spleen whenever an opportunity offered” had gone to great lengths to prove that Provoost and his companions had violated the law of the land. “Thus I was, by Logie’s tyrannical procedure, without being guilty of even a shadow of an offense, not only conducted a prisoner through Barbary, ill-treated by Negro soldiers, and had money extorted from me to pay them, but subjected to many consequent embarrassments and inconveniences from my detainment.” Provoost suspected that Logie’s initial kindness to

\(^{78}\) *Pennsylvania Evening Herald* (Philadelphia), October 18, 1786; *Massachusetts Centinel* (Boston), October 28, 1786; *Newport Mercury* (RI), October 30, 1786; *American Recorder and the Charlestown Advertiser* (MA), November 3, 1786; *Cumberland Gazette* (MD), November 9, 1786.
the Americans may have more sinister motives than were initially evident. Furthermore, Provoost contended that the United States would “never have been troubled by the Algerines had not the British set them on with the ungenerous view of distressing America to satiate her malice. . . . For accomplishing this diabolical purpose they could not have used a better engine or more willing agent than Mr. Logie, who would rejoice to see all the sons of freedom on this continent chained to gallies and our fairest maidens locked up in Algerine seraglios.” Provoost’s description of the British consul suggested all the more reason for the United States to redeem its captives as quickly as possible. In leaving the prisoners at the mercy of foreign consuls the United States further weakened their position abroad, leaving American citizens subject to the diplomatic intrigues of foreign powers. The captives themselves soon confirmed Provoost’s suspicions of the British consul. “Consul Logie, treated us with indifference, which, I assure you, is much to his discredit; and I was happy when relieved from a dependence so humiliating to Americans.”

Yet Provoost’s criticism was not limited to the British consul. He also argued that the American people and their government shared some of the blame for their present situation. “We who are not in fetters but breathing the sweet air of freedom, do we seem to be touched with the relation of the calamities incident to the dismal situation of these unfortunate captives—our fellow creatures, our countrymen? No!” Such delay, Provoost believed, was the result of the “mistaken idea” that the captives were “civilly treated.”

79Daily Advertiser (New York), February 6, 1786; Columbian Herald or the Patriotic Courier of North America (Charleston, SC), March 6, 1786; Daily Advertiser (New York), February 7, 1786; Independent Gazetteer (New York), May 27, 1786; Columbian Herald or the Patriotic Courier of North America (Charleston, SC), June 15, 1786, Charleston Evening Gazette (SC), June 16, 1786.
Yet, “humanity exclaims that something ought to be done for these unhappy men. . . . If the Congress or the legislatures of the several states do not take up this matter seriously, individuals ought and surely will.” While much of Provoost’s scorn was reserved for the British actions, he was also concerned that his fellow citizens and the government had failed to act. Once the full nature of the suffering endured by the American captives was understood, Provoost was certain that the American people would not stand idly by.\footnote{The Daily Advertiser (New York), February 7, 1786.}

Provoost’s letter, while certainly skeptical of English intentions toward the United States, was also a call for reform of the national government. A merchant and a cousin of the Rev. Samuel Provoost, the Episcopal Bishop of New York, David Provoost was a member of New York's elite, and probably knew John Jay, who served as a church warden in Samuel Provoost's church. These New York connections suggest that while his rant against Logie may have stemmed from personal experience, his call on Americans to do more may well have represented the opinions of many in New York who recognized that the security of American citizens abroad required the reformation of the national government.\footnote{See the Connecticut Journal 27 August 1788 which describes the laying of the cornerstone for the construction of a new Episcopal Church in New York, “The Right Reverend Samuel Provoost, D.D. Bishop of New York, being Rector . . . The Honorable John Jay, Esq. Church Warden.”}

The inability of the new American government to redeem the captives in Algiers and secure safe passage for American vessels in the Mediterranean resulted in a widespread unease about the safety of all American citizens. Writing from New York, Louis Guillaume Otto, comte de Mosloy, the French charge d'affaires in the United States, observed that “the hostilities of the Barbarian corsairs have made a great sensation
in America.” Throughout the country Americans began to worry about the fate that might befall those family members traveling abroad. George Mason feared that his son John would be taken captive by Algerian corsairs if he were to travel to the Mediterranean, Hyram Faris of Annapolis feared his brother might be taken captive en route Amsterdam, and even Thomas Jefferson advised that his daughter Polly delay her trip to Paris for fear of her capture. Most notably, rumors circulated throughout the colonies that Ben Franklin had been taken captive by Algerian corsairs as he attempted to return to the United States from Europe. The atmosphere of heightened tension brought on by the Barbary threat was made more so by the press. “The editors of news-papers find, that nothing contributes more to the sale of their merchandize in this city than paragraphs respecting Dr. Franklin; at one time they put him to death by fever. . . on his passage; at another they send him a captive to Algiers. . . such anecdotes answer their purpose as well as if they were true.” Despite such rumors, the article went on to reveal “that our respectable and valuable friend is safe arrived at Philadelphia.” The sense of unease and the news of Americans in captivity sold newspapers. The sense of insecurity kept the American people focused on national and international events.  

This insecurity continued to be fed by reports of growing Algerian strength. On the tenth anniversary of American independence, American papers ran reports on the power of the Algerian navy, reporting that “the Algerines are very formidable at sea” and that “six stout frigates have already sailed from port. . . . The largest of the above frigates

mounts 44 guns, and they are exceeding fine vessels, built upon European principle, and are manned with numerous crews of resolute fellows, who are daring, and fight desperately.” These reports also predicted that “unless the United States can find means to make peace with the dey, whose imperious demands are very exorbitant, their trade up the Mediterranean and other parts of Europe will be annihilated.” A decade after declaring their independence, citizens of the United States were far from secure about their place in the world. The crisis in Algiers left many Americans questioning the ability of their government to protect their liberties.83

Despite the failure of Lamb’s mission, Congress continued its efforts to redeem the American captives. These efforts were spurred on in part by the petition of Hannah Stephens, of Concord, Massachusetts, the wife of captive sailor Isaac Stephens. Hannah Stephens petitioned Congress to redouble their efforts to secure the release of the American sailors, not only because the sailors themselves faced the “horrors of Algerian slavery,” but also for the families they left behind. Hannah herself had been “left with little . . . to support her and their small helpless children.” Without the aid of her husband, Hannah and her children had “long since been reduced to the necessity of seeking Alms or perishing.” Following Stephens’ letter, Congress instructed Jefferson to continue the efforts to achieve peace. Jefferson responded to the congressional command positively, noting that “the motives which lead to [these efforts] must be found in the Feelings of the human Heart . . . for these Sufferers who are of our own Country, and the

83Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), July 4, 1786; New Jersey Journal (Elizabethtown), July 5, 1786; Pennsylvania Herald and General Advertiser (Easton), July 8, 1786, Middlesex Gazette (Middletown, CT), July 10, 1786.
obligations of every Government to yield Protection to their citizens, as the Consideration for their Obedience.” Frustrated with the failure of direct efforts to secure the release of the American sailors in Algiers, Jefferson turned to indirect efforts. Jefferson looked to the French religious order, the Mathurins, for assistance in securing the release of the prisoners. With Congressional approval Jefferson secretly funded the religious order, hoping that their long standing relationship with the Dey of Algiers might allow them to negotiate the release of the American captives. These efforts were short lived, however, as the Mathurins were caught up in the wave of the French Revolution and Jefferson’s secret negotiations failed to bring an end to the crisis. With the failure of the Mathurin gambit, Congress became increasingly frustrated in their efforts. By 1787 members of Congress calculated that the cost of redeeming the captives would be in excess of fifty thousand dollars. That fall, Congress went as far as to consider an impost on seamen’s wages, in an attempt to raise funds for relief of the prisoners. It was quickly pointed out that such a policy was impossible as such regulation was beyond the power of Congress under the Articles of Confederation. Congressional efforts to redeem the sailors in Algiers had once again been limited by their frame of government.\textsuperscript{84}

Even as the discussion of the redemption of the captives at Algiers occupied Congress, tensions in western United States continued to demand their attention. In late July 1787, a letter from the governor of Virginia informed Congress that “in the course of last summer the inhabitants of Kentucky were compelled for their own preservation to

commence expeditions against the Indians on both sides of the Ohio” and that the state of Virginia had covered all of the expenditures of the expeditions. As Virginia sought assistance in their efforts to aid Kentucky, Congress debated the role of the federal government in overseeing relations between the state of Georgia and the Creek and Cherokee nations. The threat to American security on the nation’s western boundary required as much attention and, on occasion, as much financial support as the threats in the Atlantic world. Faced with a lack of funds (despite loans from various European nations and the state treasuries of Virginia and New York), Congress found itself unable to protect American citizens both in the east and the west. The limitations placed on Congress by the Articles of Confederation left the American federal government unable to deal with diplomatic issues in any meaningful way.85

Congress’s inability to resolve these international issues was met with growing popular dissatisfaction. By the late summer of 1786, evidence of this dissatisfaction began to appear in the American press. Writing from Philadelphia, “Benevolus” argued that since the federal agent sent to Algiers had failed to achieve peace that “it is high time that the inhabitants of the country should immediately proceed to redeem those unfortunate men who have fallen into the hands of those barbarians.” The need for the people to act was only made more apparent by the fact that “the French, the Spanish, and other nations by charitable contributions every year ransom numbers of their countrymen who became captives to the piratical states.” Given these successes, could “America, that boasts a greater degree of liberty and purer religion fall short in humanity and

85 Journals of the Continental Congress 31 July 1787; Journals of the Continental Congress 2 August 1787.
compassion for fellow citizens now groaning in slavery?—Slavery the more insupportable as their former condition was free.” Benevolus challenged those “opulent” Americans who have benefited from their liberty to take up a collection and promote a subscription to redeem the American captives that the government had been unable to liberate. Benevolus’s letter was followed with a postscript from the publisher calling on every “son of liberty who is blessed with a feeling heart” give their full attention to the call for a collection for the relief of the captives in the face of Congressional failures. 86

The following spring “Humanitas” asked how Americans enjoying the fruits of liberty could neglect their fellow countrymen, “those who had once lived in affluence, and under a government of liberty and independence, are now at the will of a merciless tyrant, dragging out a miserable existence in the worst of slavery.” Furthermore, Humanitas noted, the unfortunate captives could not rely on Congress or the state government for their freedom:

It is not at present in the power of Congress to raise a sum sufficient to effect the purpose. Other concerns (though perhaps not of greater magnitude) must be provided for; foreign debts are to be paid, the expences of the late war, the inability of Congress to discharge their engagements, and a thousand other circumstances, render it impracticable, nay impossible for the to effect so desirable an end. To what source then are the unhappy sufferers to look for their liberty? Congress have it not in their power, the Legislatures of the several states are unable.

According to Humanitas it was the people themselves who bore the responsibility to redeem those trapped in slavery. “If every one in these states were to pay but six pence each, enough would be raised to ransom twelve or fourteen freeborn Americans, from the savage oppression of a barbarous tyrant.” If such an effort were to be undertaken,

86 The Pennsylvania Packet (Philadelphia), August 7, 1786; The New York Journal or the Weekly Register (NY), August 24, 1786. For more on the challenge to “opulent” Americans in the face of the captivity of Americans in North Africa see Allison, The Crescent Obscured, 127-151.
Humanitas had no doubt that “the females . . . would contribute largely, and set an example of genuine liberality,” in order to aid “those brave men who have fought for the liberty which is now enjoyed.” Humanitas argued that once such an effort was begun the spirit of the American people would remedy the inadequacies of their government.  

By June 1787 the newspapers of Philadelphia ran advertisements for the very type of action that both Benevolus and Humanitas had called for. The advertisement promised an evening of entertainment for the “Relief of our Fellow-Citizens enslaved at Algiers.” The evening, held at the “request of many respectable Citizens,” was to consist of “a poetical address, composed for the occasion,” followed by a concert both “vocal and instrumental,” and “the whole will conclude with an elegant vaud-ville.” The “poetical address,” which was later published in the *The Columbian Magazine* and *The Columbian Herald*, called on Americans to note well that the captivity of the American sailors was “the shame of nations and the source of tears.” The source of this suffering was “the Barbarous triumph of Algiers . . . and friends to freedom, languishing in chains.” These Americans trapped in slavery were the very people “whose patriot toil gave independence to their native soil. Lost in the vicissitudes of fate, call on the country to repay the debt.” Faced with a government that could not redeem its captive sailors, private citizens, through the medium of the theater, had begun to take action by the summer of 1787.  

The motives for this event were likely several fold, representing a number of political interests. Regardless of the subject matter being performed, the theaters were

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87 *Independent Gazetteer* (New York), April 2, 1787; *American Recorder* (Charlestown, MA), April 20, 1787; *Essex Journal* (Newburyport, MA), May 2, 1787.  
88 *Independent Gazetteer* (New York), June 23, 1787 and June 25, 1787; *Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), June 23, 1787; *Columbian Herald or the Patriotic Courier of North America* (Charleston, SC), October 11, 1787.
themselves the focus of political conflict in the years following the Revolution. The Pennsylvania General Assembly, spurred on in part by Quaker interests, had passed anti-theater legislation during the Revolution fearing that such forms of entertainment served as a “school of vice” that would lead the citizens of the new Republic to “forget their political duties.” By way of contrast, theater supporters argued that “the playhouse—that School of Republican Virtue—offered a forum to circulate the correct cultural doctrine of the new nation.” Efforts to reopen the Philadelphian theaters were spearheaded by Lewis Hallam Jr., whose father had been a well-known pre-war actor and manager of the Philadelphia stage. Following the Revolution, Hallam worked continuously, petitioning the Pennsylvania General Assembly to lift the ban on theater productions, citing the importance of play-going as a “necessary concomitant of our Independence.” Those who supported the theater felt that the stage could serve to entrench republican ideals in the emerging American character.  

The crisis in Algiers offered the perfect opportunity for Hallam to demonstrate the importance of the theater to the new nation. Drawing on popular unease over the crisis in Algiers, Hallam offered an opportunity for Philadelphians to show their support for the captives, while also showing their support for the theater. In attending the benefit performance at the Southwark Theater in Philadelphia, the citizens of that city were making their views on two significant issue of the day clear for all to see—their support of the captives and their support of the theater. The rising popular support for both of these issues coincided with what appeared to be change for the better. As Philadelphia

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theater patrons attended the benefit for the captive American sailors, delegates from the various states were assembled at the Constitutional Convention in that same city. Buoyed by the news of the convention many Americans, including the captive sailors, believed that that a new national government might bring an end to the crisis in Algiers.\footnote{90}

As unease about the future of the nation led many to question the “slow and uncertain” aid of the federal government to the captives, news of the Constitutional Convention offered a source of hope. In several cases, news of the “illustrious body of patriots and heroes” that had gathered to reform the government ran along side news of continuing suffering of the captives in Algiers. The contrasting nature of these reports did not go unnoted. As “Harrington” observed, news of the situation in Algiers made clear that “under the present weak, imperfect, and distracted Government of Congress, anarchy, poverty, infamy, and SLAVERY await the United States.” Yet, the fact that an effort at government reform headed by “the immortal Washington” created the possibility that “America may yet enjoy peace, safety, liberty and glory.” Harrington’s simultaneous expression of concern and hope aptly summed up the feelings of many Americans. The crisis in Algiers had only served to further questions about the ability of the Continental Congress to effective govern the new nation and protect the hard-won liberties of the American people. The assembly of the Constitutional Convention offered hope that Americans might soon find themselves with a government better able to secure the promise of the Revolution.\footnote{91}

\footnote{90} The repeal of the anti-theater law came in 1789 with a change in the Pennsylvania state legislature, the captives in Algiers would have to wait until 1796 for their freedom.

\footnote{91} *Connecticut Courant* (Hartford), June 11, 1787; *Independent Journal* (New York), June 2, 1787.
The crisis in Algiers opened a national discussion that ranged from the halls of Congress to the pages of American newspapers. Above all else, the crisis in Algiers put a face to the otherwise abstract realm of foreign affairs. While access to the Mississippi River and British control of Western forts were a reality only to those on the western frontier of the United States and the closing of British ports was an issue primarily felt by urban merchants, the unease that arose following the seizure of American ships at Algiers drew widespread interest. This interest led to expanded debate and as the debate spread, the crisis helped push the boundaries of an emerging American public sphere. While the earliest moments of an American public sphere is the topic of some debate, there seems to be general agreement that by the 1780s the United States had witnessed a change in the way information was shared and discussed. The growth of newspapers, pamphlets, and public lectures in the years following the American Revolution meant that a world in which the “words of the authoritative few to the people” were taken as civic discourse was replaced by a world in which the civic discourse came to be the “conversation of the people.” The changes allowed for a new model of civil society to emerge. Political actors came to include a wide cross section of citizens. American society allowed for debate to occur between its citizens, in the press and in public displays such as parades and civic festivals. These local public events became national events as newspapers narrated the activities to a nationwide audience. The public sphere was opened wide to
expression of political or social dissent. Through public demonstrations, the press, and even theater attendance, citizens of the United States found a voice in civil society.⁹²

The expanding limits of the public sphere were pushed even further as the captive sailors attempted to plead their case from abroad. The Americans in Algiers occupied a wholly novel position in that although entitled to the full rights of citizenship, they found themselves forced to the edges of civil society, without their consent. Their position stood in contrast to others who had attempted to voice their opposition to the established order from the edges of society. The captives did not seek to challenge the existing order by assuming a position outside of civil society as had been the case in Boston in the earliest days of the American Revolution and on the Maine frontier in the earliest years of the Republic, when those who challenged the direction of the government adopted the persona of “white Indians.” Nor had the captives voluntarily withdrawn to a life of isolation, outside the bounds of civil society. The captives were in fact doing just the opposite, they were looking to the government to fulfill its obligations, to intervene on their half and restore them to liberty. While their petition for government protection was

far from unique, their inability move beyond the realm of persuasion into the realm of insurgency and force left them uniquely vulnerable. The efforts of the American sailors in Algiers to spur the United States government to act on their behalf was, in effect, a test of the principles of the American Revolution itself—the American Government needed to act to protect its citizens from the tyranny of a foreign power. 93

The issue of foreign policy, as Jack Rakove has observed, “posed the most alarming questions the delegates encountered between the Treaty of Paris and the calling of the Philadelphia Convention.” Despite the importance of international relations, it was largely ignored by those outside of the government. The crisis in Algiers shocked many in the American public into paying attention to the larger Atlantic world. When Congress proved unable to fulfill their obligation to secure the liberty of the captive citizens in Algiers, their calls for relief, which had been well documented in the American press, were taken up by an newly attentive American citizenry, who became themselves active participants in public debate. The crisis in Algiers demonstrated the evolving nature of the American public sphere in the years following the Revolution. Following the lessons learned in the years leading up to and during the American Revolution, American citizens recognized the need to take action when the government failed to fulfill its obligations.

“Prominent citizens” in some of the major port cities, stirred to action by the accounts of

American sailors sold into slavery, began to organize efforts to raise the funds to redeem the captives themselves. These actions demonstrate how quickly American citizens came to recognize the importance of the public sphere in the new nation. Not only was the public sphere a realm in which to encourage government action, but so too was it a realm in which to move to correct the government’s shortcomings in the case of inaction.

Although the Constitutional Convention and the promise of a more effective government cut short the first public efforts to redeem the captive Americans, the lesson of the importance of public action in the new nation was not forgotten and, as will be discussed below, when the Washington administration was unable to effectively resolve the crisis, reports of private efforts to redeem the captives in Algiers once again appeared in the pages of the American press. The failings of the Confederation government served to remind the citizens of the new United States that the American experiment would not succeed without their active attention to national and international affairs.94

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94 Rakove, The Beginnings of National Politics, 351. The growing importance of foreign affairs to the American public was not lost on those who supported the new federal constitution. During the ratification process, James Madison reminded the people of New York in Federalist 41, that the state of New York “is penetrated by a large navigable river for more than fifty leagues. The great emporium of its commerce, the great reservoir of its wealth, lies every moment at the mercy of events, and may almost be regarded as a hostage for ignominious compliances with the dictates of a foreign enemy, or even with the rapacious demands of pirates and barbarians.” He further argues that the current “phantom” of a national government can do little to protect the people of New York from such attacks, but that under the new Constitution, a national government will be better able to protect its citizens from the demands of “pirates and barbarians.” For more on the importance of foreign affairs in the ratification of the Constitution see Frederick Marks III, Independence on Trial.
CHAPTER 3
“A SPEEDY RELEASE TO OUR SUFFERING CAPTIVE BRETHREN IN ALGIERS”:
AMERICAN LIBERTY AND PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EARLY AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Ratification of the Constitution offered hope that a more powerful central government would decisively end the Algerine crisis, but the on-going enslavement of the crews of the Dauphin, captured in 1785, and the capture of nine more ships in 1793 disabused Americans of this notion. The continued enslavement of American sailors by North African pirates had many Americans concerned about the safety and prosperity of their nation. This fear, and the inability of the federal government to redeem more than one hundred American sailors enslaved in Algiers caused many Americans to become more active in finding a resolution to this crisis. They petitioned Congress, sent letters to the press, wrote poetry and plays, and even the raised funds for the captives’ redemption. Such actions mark an important step in the development and democratization of what Jürgen Habermas has labeled the “public sphere.” The debate over the ratification of the Constitution and partisan tensions over the French Revolution had shaped the early development of the public sphere in the United States, while the plight of the American captives in Algiers tested its viability.95

From Algiers the American sailors who had been sold into slavery made full use of the emerging public sphere to call their fellow citizens to their aid. In letters to both government officials and private citizens the captive sailors called for their fellow countrymen to find the “ways and means” for their “Restoration from slavery.” Spurred on by letters from the captives and accounts of their suffering republished in the American press, many in the public were drawn into efforts to work for the release of the American sailors. The sailors’ initial attempts to increase public awareness of their plight eventually resulted in the organization of private collections taken up on their behalf.  

These efforts built on a growing public interest in national affairs which had emerged following the debate surrounding the ratification of the Constitution. This culture of open debate remained an important aspect of the political culture of the early American Republic. Despite a belief among members of George Washington’s administration and their Federalist supporters that the public ought not to play a role in politics outside of elections, the American people continued to actively debate national issues. In August of 1792, the French Minister Plenipotentiary Jean Baptiste de Ternant

(Amherst, MA, 2006). Estes argues that in the course of the Jay Treaty debate the Federalists revealed themselves to be a more fluid and dynamic entity than many historians have given them credit for. The core of his argument centers on the Federalist efforts to engage the public in building support for the Jay Treaty. This article, however, challenges Estes analysis of the Federalists as innovators, arguing, rather, that they were brought around to the importance of public opinion following the public outcry for a resolution to the crisis in Algiers.

*Algerine Captives to George Washington, 22 September 1788, Washington Papers (Library of Congress, Washington, DC). The subsequent letters from the captives would be published in newspapers throughout the country, both in coastal towns and as far west as the Ohio Territory. The participation of the captives themselves adds an important aspect to this debate with regard to the public sphere. While there have been a number of studies that explore the bounds of the public sphere in the Early Republic, few have stretched the limits beyond the physical boundaries of the United States. The growing public interest in this crisis was sparked in large part by the captives themselves, shaping public opinion and participating in the debate from a foreign shore. For more on the boundaries of the public sphere in America see the forum “Alternative Histories of the Public Sphere” in The William and Mary Quarterly (January 2005): 3-112.
noted that “the newspapers are filled daily with articles either defending or bitterly attacking the new federal government, as well as the actions of its principal agents, and each party seeks thus to win the approaching elections.” The Italian-born friend of Thomas Jefferson, Philip Mazzei, remarked that the American people “seek to inform themselves upon public affairs because they find it to their interest. The progress made by the American people, since the beginning of the Revolution till now, in the matter of reasoning upon this sort of affairs is really astonishing.”

One of the clearest manifestations of the active interest in American politics in this period was the emergence of the Democratic-Republican societies. Sparked in large part by the promise of the French Revolution, these societies stood in opposition to many of the policies of the Washington administration. Stretching from Vermont to South Carolina these societies, made up of a wide cross-section of the American population ranging from farmers and sailors to doctors and lawyers, questioned federal policies and encouraged the American public to keep abreast of current issues and keep a watchful eye on government activities. Domestically, the heart of the societies’ distaste for the administration was the financial policies of Alexander Hamilton and the perceived elitism of the members of the Federal government. On the international level, the Democratic-Republican societies were horrified at Washington’s unwillingness to support the French against the English and the Dutch. Such actions, the members of the societies charged,

not only left an American ally in the lurch but had been taken against the will of the people.\textsuperscript{98}

Democratic-Republican societies and their Republican allies in Congress recognized the power of the popular movement in support of the Americans in Algiers and were quick to embrace it. The popular movement to bring an end to the crisis in Algiers, while utterly contrary to the Federalist model of American government, represented the heart of Republican philosophy. According to Madison, a republic, “in order to effect is purposes, must operate . . . within . . . an extensive sphere.” Operating in this “extensive sphere,” the people of the republic are better able to develop a common vision and this “public opinion” ought to “set bounds to every Government, and is the real sovereign in every free one.” A broad-based effort to redeem American captives in Algiers may not have been exactly what Madison had envisaged, stretching the bounds of his extensive sphere to the shores of North Africa, but this crisis eventually pervaded much of public debate.\textsuperscript{99}

As efforts on behalf of the captive sailors gained ground among the public, the Federalist majority in Congress sought to maintain control of the Algerian crisis. Even as the public calls for Congressional action grew, many Federalist members of Congress worked to limit the public’s access to information. Congressional galleries were closed


to the public in all sessions that took up the “Algerine business.” Efforts at secrecy were met with opposition from many of the Republican members of Congress, who forced a vote on the issue of the closed galleries on several occasions. In addition to these procedural efforts Republican members of Congress included news of Algiers in the circular letters that they sent to their constituents. The Congressional debates and the circular letters were emblematic of the differences between Republican and Federalist visions of the importance of public access to information. While Federalists were loath to give the public any information on the issue of foreign affairs, believing that such matters were the purview of the government rather than the general public, the Republicans moved in the opposite direction. The commitment to openness on the part of many Republicans was highlighted in the body of their open letters to constituents which commonly related news of foreign affairs in the years before the War of 1812.\(^\text{100}\)

The Federalists eventually moved to a policy of greater openness in early 1794, when they had finally developed a plan to deal with the Algerian crisis. The resolution called for the construction of “six frigates, 4 of 44, and 2 of 20 guns,” which were believed “to be amply sufficient to protect the commerce of the United States against the Pirates of Barbary.” Characteristically, the Federalists only allowed public access after they had reached a solution which they believed would solve the issues faced by the

\(^{100}\) I have only been able to find the text from a few of these petitions, although references to the many “humane petitions” which had been presented to Congress appear in a number of sources, including *Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 19, 1793. The closing of the galleries seemed to be a common occurrence and a source of frustration to both Republican members of Congress and printers who had hoped to deliver news to their readers. See particularly *The Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), December 30, 1793 and the New York *Daily Gazette*, January 3, 1794; Todd Estes “Shaping the Politics of Public Opinion: Federalist and the Jay Treaty Debate,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, (Autumn, 2000), 395-396; Noble E. Cunningham, Jr. “Introduction,” *Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents 1789-1829*, vol. 1 (Chapel Hill, 1978), XL-XLII.
public. Despite a belief that the creation of a navy would bring an end to public anxiety, the non-governmental efforts continued unabated until news of a negotiated settlement, which provided for the release of the captives, had been announced in early 1796.\footnote{Green Leaf’s New York Journal and Patriotic Register (New York), February 12, 1794.}

The crisis in Algiers was a critical moment in the development of American politics and the American public sphere. From the distant shores of Algiers, American citizens enslaved by a foreign power were able to use the developing public sphere to draw national attention to their plight. The cause of the captive sailors became the cause of a wide cross-section of the American people and eventually the cause of the federal government. Those calling for the liberation of the sailors in Algiers found willing allies in the minority Republicans, who were quick to make the increasingly popular cause a cause of their own. By way of contrast, the Federalists recognized the need for action, but thought it best if private citizens remained apart from the discussion. In the course of this crisis, however, the Federalists came to realize that if they were to achieve their goals, they would have to engage the public more directly. The lessons of the Algerian crisis helped lay the foundation for the strategy the Federalists applied in securing passage of the Jay Treaty a few months later. Ultimately, the crisis in Algiers demonstrated the persuasive power of American public opinion in the formal deliberations of the American government.
When the American ships *Maria* and *Dauphin* were taken captive by North African corsairs in 1785, news of the seizure sent shockwaves across the nation. The reports that these American sailors had been sold into slavery only deepened American concerns. The crisis in Algiers served to cast further doubts on the ability of the Continental Congress to effectively govern the new nation and protect the hard-won liberties of the American people. It appeared to many that the weak central government under the Articles of Confederation was unable to protect American citizens abroad. With the assembly of the Constitutional Convention in 1787, there was hope that Americans might soon find themselves with a government better able to secure the liberty of the American people from threats both foreign and domestic.  

In a letter addressed to George Washington in September 1788, the captain of the *Dauphin*, Richard O’Brien, called on the president-to-be to “lay before the Congress of the United States [their] truly Lamentable situation of Slavery.” O’Brien informed Washington that he and his crew had suffered an “uninterrupted scene of griefe and misery . . . surrounded with the pests and contagious distempers” for past three years and now requested that the newly reformed government of the United States make all possible efforts to secure their release. O’Brien commented that he and the captive sailors at Algiers recognized that the national government under the Articles of Confederation had lacked the funds to make arrangements for their release, “But now . . .that it hath pleased God that the new Constitution of a future government is formed and Ratified by

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102 See the Falmouth (ME) Gazette, October 25, 1785; Continental Journal (Boston), October 27, 1785; Providence (RI), Gazette 29 October 1785; Connecticut Courant (Hartford), October 31, 1785; Connecticut Journal (New Haven), November 2, 1785; and the State Gazette of South Carolina (Charlestown), November 3, 1785.
the United States [the] humble petitioners hoped that [their] situation will be taken into Consideration so that ways and means will be adopted for [their] Restoration from slavery.”103

O’Brien’s letter was followed shortly by a letter from the owner of the Dauphin, Mathew Irwin. Irwin wrote to Washington requesting that he call upon the American people to take up a collection on behalf of the prisoners to help pay for their release. In response to Irwin’s proposal, Washington wrote that while the American minister in the court of France, Mr. Jefferson “has in view, among other objects, the redemption of these unfortunate men . . . I am not satisfied that it would be proper, as you suggest, for me to begin or bring forward a subscription among the merchants and others in the maritime towns of this country, to raise a fund for delivering these unhappy men from their state of bondage.” Washington believed that this complex diplomatic issue was best left to government officials, rather than allowing the intervention of the American public.104

Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson shared Washington’s desire to limit public discussion of and participation in the redemption of the captives. Jefferson had initially called for a military solution to the crisis, but when he recognized such a solution was not immediately feasible, he suggested that a feigned indifference and secret diplomatic

efforts might be the best course of action. Negotiations, however, proceeded only haltingly after the death of the first two appointed ministers and in the shadow of an emerging Spanish threat in the American West.\(^\text{105}\)

The capture of additional American ships in 1793, however, refocused public attention on the threat posed by North African corsairs. By March 1794, news of this seizure had spread throughout the nation. Newspapers across the country published lists of the ships and their crews. Joining the \textit{Dauphin} and the \textit{Maria} were the \textit{Polly}, the \textit{President}, the \textit{Minerva} of New York, the \textit{Jay}, the \textit{George}, the \textit{Olive Branch}, the \textit{Hope}, the \textit{Jane}, and the \textit{Minerva} of Virginia. In addition to listing the captive ships, the papers warned “there are Cruisers at sea, and more fitting out in quest of Americans.” After eight years of negotiations, four under the new American government, efforts to make peace with Algiers had not only failed to redeem the American sailors from captivity, but had also allowed the capture of nine more ships. Once again, captive Americans found themselves sold into slavery and scattered about Algiers.\(^\text{106}\)

Following the seizure of additional American ships, Richard O’Brien, addressed the American people directly in a letter published in newspapers and magazines throughout the United States. O’Brien noted that he had “repeatedly for these five years past forewarned the United States of the impending danger” of failing to come to terms with Algiers. “Americans in general,” he noted “put little confidence in the assertions of

\(^{105}\) Jefferson to Adams, 11 July 1786 in \textit{The Adams and Jefferson Letters}, ed. Lester Cappon (Chapel Hill, 1959), 142; Alison, \textit{The Crescent Obscured}, 16-20. Jefferson continued to hope for a military solution, and even as he pushed for continued negotiations, he continued to believe that a military solution was preferable to any tribute. See \textit{American State Papers: Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States}, vol. 1, (Washington: Gales and Seaton 1833), 101.

a poor victim captive; but now find that they contained the truth.” Now, according to O’Brien, the Dey would not even receive the American ambassador, “either to make peace or redeem the American slaves; that he had been soliciting the Americans to come and make peace with his regency for three years past and they had treated his propositions with neglect and indifference.” Consequently, the Dey had “captured ten sail of Americans, and like to take many more.” O’Brien’s frustration was clear from the tone of his letter and the capture of the additional American ships convinced many Americans that his sentiment was justified. While the creation of a new government in 1789 had initially convinced many Americans that the fate of the American captives at Algiers was something that could be left to the government to negotiate by 1794 many Americans came to question the ability of their government to resolve the crisis on its own.  

The president and Congress soon found a country that was ready to move in support of the captive Americans with or without the assistance of their government. A wave of letters and petitions calling for more vigorous government action began to inundate the national capital. More than one hundred ship captains and owners called on Congress to enact an embargo “until such time as we can pursue our business with safety.” Wives of the sailors themselves called on Congress to act, “praying that measure may be taken for procuring the ransom, or relief from slavery of their husbands and other

107 The Columbian Gazetteer (New York), December 19, 1793; The Independent Gazetteer (Philadelphia), December 21, 1793; New Hampshire Gazette (Portsmouth), December 28, 1793; The Western Star (Stockbridge, MA), December 30, 1793; Vermont Gazette (Bennington), January 3, 1794; South Carolina State Gazette (Charlestown), January 3, 1794; The Mirrour (Concord, NH), January 6, 1794; The Massachusetts Magazine; or, Monthly Museum. Containing the Literature, History, Politics, Arts, Manners & Amusements of the Age, 6 (Issue 3, Boston: March 1794), 189.
citizens of the United States who are now in captivity at Algiers.” Three weeks later, the “citizens of the towns of Norfolk and Portsmouth . . . in the state of Virginia” called on Congress to “adopt such measures as, in their wisdom, may be deemed most expedient and effectual to obtain redress for the vexations and spoliations committed on the commerce of the United States. . . by the citizens and subjects of other foreign countries.” At a meeting in Augusta, Georgia, concerned citizens called for the creation of a committee to coordinate a financial program for the relief of Americans in Algiers. This resolution was forwarded to Congress and published in newspapers throughout the nation. In Savannah, crowds of people flocked the courthouse and called on the members of the House and Senate to adopt, “such measures as Congress may think proper . . . in order to obtain redress for the many insults and injuries committed on the American flag and commerce.” From the American frontier came “a memorial of the Representatives of the People in the United States, South of the River Ohio,” which “was presented to the House and read, praying that such measures may be adopted as deemed most expedient and effectual . . . for the releasement from slavery of such of the citizens of the United States, as are now in captivity at Algiers”.108

From New England, a concerned citizen, who identified himself as “Benevolence,” wrote to Secretary of State Edmund Randolph calling for a general collection to be taken up on behalf of the captive Americans. Echoing the letter written by Matthew Irwin half a decade earlier, Benevolence, noting that he was writing “upon

the principle of compassion,” called on President Washington to issue a proclamation urging the American people to take up a collection on behalf of the American sailors in captivity. Such a proclamation, Benevolence argued, would “touch the feelings of mankind,” and build upon a growing desire to ease “the sufferings of our citizens among the Algerines.” Benevolence had seen evidence of this growing desire to aid the sailors in his travels around New England. Farmers throughout the region were willing to contribute to the cause, none pledging less than a dollar, and Benevolence himself promised ten guineas.109

The diverse origins of these letters and petitions reveal the hold that the crisis in Algiers had over the young United States. Concern for the captive Americans spread from the coastal towns and cities to the interior of the United States, and even to the territories “south of the River Ohio.” In New York, The Daily Advertiser proclaimed that “it is not the merchant and sailor only who are interested in the war with the pirate of Algiers,” the effects of the crisis extended to every level of American society. The American people, far from retiring to their insular communities in the years following the ratification of the Constitution continued to follow national and international events and make their voices heard when they believed that their interests and ideals were at stake. Issues ranging from personal liberty to economic interests to national pride made the crisis in Algiers an issue of interest to every region of the United States.110

109 Benevolence to the President of the United States, 4 April 1794, State Department, Consular Dispatches, Algiers, Vol. 1, Part 1. See also Allison, The Crescent Obscured 127-129.
110 The Daily Advertiser (New York), December 26, 1793.
Efforts on behalf of the captive sailors did not end with petitions to Congress and letters to the President. In Philadelphia, the national capital, numerous groups emerged to deal with the situation. One committee unanimously adopted a proposal to seize the ships of nations that had captured American vessels and demanded reimbursement for any losses incurred because of illegal seizures. Another committee called upon the federal government to undertake, “the most expeditious and the most effectual measures (which appear to have been too long postponed) to procure reparations for the past; to ensure safety for the future; to foster and protect the commercial interests; and to render respectable and respected among nations of the world, the justice, dignity, and power of the American Republic.” A committee was also created to “superintend the collection, management, and distribution of the fund contemplated to relieve and redeem those unfortunate citizens belonging to the port of Philadelphia, captives of Algiers.” This committee went so far as to appoint local supervisors to oversee and encourage donations in the various wards of the city. The organization of such groups suggested the level of commitment that many Americans had to aiding the captive American sailors.\textsuperscript{111}

In April of 1794, the publishers of the \textit{Columbian Centinel} noted that they had “the satisfaction of acquainting our readers that Messrs. Dominick, Terry, and Co. have advanced the sum of Three Thousand Dollars for the maintenance of the unfortunate captives at Algiers, which sum they gave without any security or indemnification—so generous an act, it is to be hoped, will not go long unrewarded.” In Rhode Island, concerned members of the community placed for sale “to the highest bidder . . . 2000

\textsuperscript{111} \textit{The Aurora General Advertiser} (Philadelphia), March 6, 1794; \textit{Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser} (Philadelphia), March 29, 1794.
acres of LAND.” Those who had offered it for sale promised to keep no more than “half a dollar per acre, and whatever it will fetch more, shall be applied to the relief of the Americans in captivity at Algiers.” If the land sold for a reasonable market price, the article commented, “It will afford a relief of ten thousand dollars.” In Philadelphia, a sermon, originally written and delivered in German, was republished for an English speaking audience. “The object of this sermon is two-fold—the first he expects that the contents of it will be of benefit to the soul of every man who will read it with attention—The second is, that the whole amount of the sale of this sermon is intended by him for the benefit of the poor American captive in Algiers, wherefore he expects that this sermon will be bought by every charitable American who can read and understand German.” The money was to be remitted to “the managers of the ‘Society for the relief of American captives in Algiers.” While citizens from across the United States urged their government to action, other Americans were unwilling to wait for government action. In Boston, Providence, and Philadelphia the groups worked to aid in the efforts to redeem the American sailors.112

The efforts of these groups proved a partial success when in late 1794 three American prisoners were redeemed. George Smith of the Maria, William Patterson of the Dauphin, both of whom were captured in 1785, and John Burnham of the Hope were all safely returned to the United States as the result of these non-governmental collections. While the government continued to debate the best course of action, the efforts and the charity of these privately organized groups were able to return three

112 The Columbian Centinel (Boston), April 2, 1794; The Providence Gazette (RI), December 3, 1794; Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), August 22, 1794.
captive Americans to the United States. It would be another three years before the rest of the captive sailors were set free.

In addition to the non-governmental collections taken up on behalf of the captives, there was a cultural component to these redemption efforts. Throughout the country, poems elegizing the American sailors in captivity began appearing in magazines and newspapers. On the stage, theater productions dealt with the theme of captivity by restaging older plays that dealt with North African captivity and premiering new works created in response to the crisis in Algiers. One of the first poems dealing with the subject was actually part of a play, which dealt with the same topic. The epilogue of Susana Rowson’s *Slaves in Algiers* (which will be discussed in greater detail below) was published in the “Poet’s Corner” of *The Independent Gazetteer* in July 1794. Rowson’s epilogue called on the benevolent spirit of the American people, and reminded them of the power they had to bring freedom to the captives in Algiers. “What rap’trous joy must the poor captive know, Who freed from slav’ry’s ignominious chain, views his dear native land and friendship again.” The American people, according to Rowson, had the power to bring “rap’trous joy” to their fellow citizens held captive in Algiers by working to secure their release.\(^\text{113}\)

Another poem, published widely throughout the United States, related the story of a lost love. Entitled “*The American Captive—An Elegy,*” this poem told of a young sailor who held in captivity in Algiers whose suffering was made all the more intense by the memory of his Julia. The captive tearfully remembered his home and his love. “Once I,

\(^{113}\) *The Independent Gazetteer* (Worcester, MA) July 26, 1794.
Columbia, dwelt upon they shore, and the glad strains of joy and freedom joined,’’ but
then he was taken captive by “the hell-hounds of Algiers, the dreadful fauchion glitter’d
in each hand.” Despite the valiant efforts of the crew, they found themselves
overwhelmed and “the vigor of a freeman’s arm was vain, in vain man’s sacred rights and
country plead; around our limbs they fold the galling chain—See, O my country! You’r
brave freemen bleed.” The poem attempted to give a human face to the suffering in
North Africa. In presenting the captive sailors as once joyous citizens now suffering at
the hands of “hell hounds,” the poem attempted to draw Americans to support the cause
of the Americans held in Algiers.

In addition to describing the plight of the prisoners themselves, the poem depicted
the plight of family members left behind. “There my fond father and mother live and
sorrowing mourn their son’s unhappy lot; thousands for ransom cheerfully they’d give—
but Poverty surrounds their weeping cot.” Left behind was also his “lovely Julia . . . fair
as the beauty of the dawning morn.” Sadly, the captive found himself far from his family
and “happy cultur’d fields” and “cooling shade” of “Columbia.” Instead of his happy
home, the captive had been made a prisoner amongst the “screaming calls,” and “dismal
dread,” that mark the land of Algiers. The poem concluded with a call on American
citizens to remember their humanity and patriotic virtue and come to the aid of the
captive countrymen:

        Ah! Cruel country! Can my groans and pain
        Make no impression on they callous heart?
      Does not the glow of Sympathy remain?
        Does not Humanity its sigh impart?
  Art thou the land where Freedom rears her throne,
        Where conquered WASHINGTON, where WARREN bled,
    Where patriotic Virtue, and where Valor shone,
And where oppression bow’d her guilt-stain’d head.\textsuperscript{114}

Playing on many of the same themes as Rowson’s epilogue, “The American Captive” provided a personal story to give a face to the suffering of the captives in Algiers and called upon the American people to remember their heritage and fulfill their obligation as Americans to redeem the suffering captives. To do otherwise, would shame the land that claims to be the very seat of Freedom herself.

Meanwhile, on stage, American theater companies brought their own interpretation to the crisis. Nowhere was the vigor of public interest in the plight of the American sailors more apparent than in American theaters. The crisis in Algiers came at time of transition for the American theater. According to Heather Nathans, theaters in the Early American Republic were on unstable ground. During the colonial and revolutionary period, many theaters had been closed down by public decree as a symbol of excess and luxury. As the nation began to stabilize following the Revolution, American theaters began to reemerge as public institutions. Attempting to secure both funding and public support, theaters in the 1790s seized on the issue of captivity as a theme which would neither “offend their wealthy Federalist patrons, nor . . . turn the tide of popular political sentiment against the theater.” The threat of the pirates of Algiers was a theme that seemed to resonate with the largest possible audience. In 1794, American theaters in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia ran English playwright John Brown’s \textit{Barbarossa, Tyrant of Algiers}. Although the play had been written nearly half a century earlier, the theme of Algerian tyranny was all too real to Americans in 1794. Based

\textsuperscript{114} The New York Magazine, or Literary Repository, August 1794, 516-518.
loosely on the history of Algiers, the play recounted the story of Barbarossa, a Turkish sea captain who helped the Algerians in driving out Spanish invaders, only to turn on the Algerians once the Spanish had been defeated and seek to rule the state himself. In conjunction with the production of *Barbarossa*, Mathew Carey of Philadelphia published *A Short Account of Algiers*, which contained a history of the region. Both on stage and in print, Americans were exposed to a history of tyranny in Algiers.\(^{115}\)

By December of 1794, a new play, *Slaves in Algiers, or, a Struggle for Freedom*, by Susanna Rowson, replaced *Barbarossa* as the play of choice in presenting theater going audiences with a vision of American captivity in Algiers. Even as it was performed on stages throughout the United States, it appeared in book form at the price of a quarter of a dollar. The play, highlighting American virtue, depicted an escape by American captives in Algiers from two villains, Muley Moloc, the Dey of Algiers, and Ben Hassan, an English Jew who had become a Muslim renegade. Rowson portrayed the American captives as the embodiment of American virtue in the face of Algerian tyranny.

The two female captives, Rebecca and Olivia, resisted the advances of the Muley Moloc and Ben Hassan clinging to their American identity. In maintaining their virtue, both Rebecca and Olivia set an example for the Muslim women around them. Present with an Americanized world-view, the Muslim women eagerly accepted this new perspective. One of the Muslim women commented that “it was [Rebecca] . . . who taught me, woman was never formed to be the abject slave of man. . . She came from that land where virtue

in either sex is the only mark of superiority—She was an American.” As Americans worried over the fate of their fellow countrymen in Algiers and the fate of their nation as a whole, Rowson offered a reassuring message, even in a state of slavery at the hands of a tyrannical ruler, Americans could retain their identity in clinging to their virtue. American identity could defend itself regardless of place or condition.  

The success of these plays led to a fusion in the relief effort. In addition to presenting plays that dealt with the captivity crisis, American theaters also took a more direct role in the relief efforts offering benefit shows almost immediately after news of the captivity of the nine American ships reached the United States. Theater companies across the nation donated part of their profits to relief funds established for the American captives. In Philadelphia, the New Theater “generously and humanely propose[d] appropriating the profits arising from [their] . . . entertainment, towards mitigating the sufferings of [their] distressed brethren at Algiers.” The Gazette of the United States praised these efforts as “an offer so noble and philanthropic” that it “justly merits the thanks and approbation of the citizens of Philadelphia.” Newspapers throughout the country published reports of the theaters efforts, noting that in one night, the theater managed to take in “1230 dollars—the clear profit probably about 900.” In South Carolina, “the sum of two hundred and fifty six pounds two shillings and sixpence sterling, was the amount of the benefit night at the Theatre in Charleston.” In Boston, the American Minerva lavished praise on the efforts on the manager of the Federal Street

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Theater. “We shall not attempt a panegyric on Mr. Powell, for his benevolence in this measure—the “recording angel” has placed in the archives of Heaven; and the prayers of the captives, whose cup will be sweetened by the act, will to him be more than ample recompence. The sum collected amounted to Nine Hundred Dollars.” In New York the Old American Company began performing *Barbarossa* “for the RELIEF of the American captives in Algiers.” Becoming more than a symbolic link with the captives in Algiers, the American theater began to take an active role in aiding the captive sailors.\(^\text{118}\)

While the plight of the American captives was being played out on stage, the emerging Democratic-Republican societies took of the cause of the American sailors as part of their political agenda. In Baltimore, a local Republican society, resolved to “do everything in its power for the relief of the unfortunate American suffers at Algiers,” following the reading of a petition from Richard O’Brien on behalf of the captive Americans. At New York’s City Hall in March 1794, “a very numerous meeting of our true republican fellow-citizens assembled . . . to express the sincere joy they felt at the recapture of Toulon, and other happy success of our brave and generous allies, the citizens of the French Republic.” From there they paraded to the house of the French consul were the celebration continued and “during the repast . . . patriotic Toasts were drank,” including a toast to “our captive brethren in Algiers; may the protecting hand of our government be speedily extended to their relief.” The toast was met with “9 cheers.”

\(^{118}\) *The Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), April 19, 1794; *The American Minerva* (New York), May 23, 1794; *Weekly Museum* (New York), June 28, 1794.
The failure of the Washington administration to redeem the American sailors proved a political weapon that the Republican societies could use to discredit Federalist rule.\textsuperscript{119}

Other less partisan groups also took up the cause of the imprisoned Americans. On St. Patrick’s Day, the Shakespearean Society of Boston held a celebration in remembrance of the people of Ireland who, during the Revolution, “were uniformly friends to American liberty and independence.” After the dinner, numerous toasts were given including a call for the celebrants, in their festivity, to remember their “brethren in slavery and in chains—and may the public spirit of Americans speedily wipe off the stain of permitting their fellow countrymen so long to continue captives in Algiers.”\textsuperscript{120}

Celebrations of the independence of both the United States and France, offered occasion for toasts that included an acknowledgement of the plight of the American captives. In Charleston, South Carolina, the Fourth of July was “a day with festive mirth and good harmony,” which was concluded with a series of toasts offered by the Cincinnati and Revolutionary Societies, including a remembrance of “the American captives at Algiers: may their bondage soon happily terminate, and be never experienced by any more of their fellow citizens.” In Baltimore, the storming of the Bastille in Paris was commemorated by the “Baltimore Washington Rifle Company, at the house of Capt. Resse,” where the toasts called for “a speedy release to our suffering captive brethren in Algiers, and an entire civilization or extermination of the Barbary corsairs.”\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{119} The Gazette of the United States (Philadelphia), July 24, 1794; The Diary or Loudon’s Register (New York), March 11, 1794.
\textsuperscript{120} The Columbian Centinel (Boston), March 19, 1794.
\textsuperscript{121} The South Carolina State Gazette and Timothy’s Daily Adviser (Charlestown), July 7, 1794; Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), July 28, 1794.
Regardless of the cause for gathering or the political affiliation of the group, the plight of the American sailors at Algiers was commemorated at events around the nation.

Just as plays on behalf of the Americans in Algiers offered an opportunity for new American voices to be heard, so too were these toasts a growing part of American public sphere. As David Waldstreicher had noted, “Anyone who proclaimed a toast, cheered one, or discussed it was a participant in both ceremony and criticism.” In addition to highlighting issues for the audience at such celebrations, the toasts were often reprinted in newspapers throughout the country, expanding the power of a single evening’s toast. Local festivities, including the toasts, were part of a local effort on the part of individuals to participate in a larger national dialogue. While those who attended these gatherings or even those giving the toast lacked the standing of an elected member of the federal government, these public forums and the subsequent transmission of these toasts through the press offered these citizens a voice that could help shape national policy. Remembering the captive Americans, these toasts put pressure on both the American government and the American people to restore their countrymen to liberty.122

The pressure to act was keenly felt by members of Congress, however, the response to this pressure had a distinctly partisan character. Congressional allies of the Democratic-Republican societies sought to allow the public access to debates over the crisis in Algiers. The Federalists, who saw the Democratic-Republican societies as a threat to the United States, worked to limit public access and deal with the crisis without the aid of private citizens. A closely divided House supported a Federalist approach to

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122 Waldstreicher, In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes, 222-223, 180.
the crisis in Algiers, closing all sessions dealing with the issue to public viewing. This policy, however, did not go unchallenged. On several occasions, Republican members of Congress sought to overturn the House rule which limited public access to these discussions. Republican opponents to the closing of the galleries spoke out against “mystery in government,” and noted that “it was the business of the House at all times to favor publicity, and it ought not be in the power of any individual to shut out the constituents of Congress but for the strongest of reasons.” Despite these Republican calls for greater transparency, an effort to amend house rules failed forty-four in favor to forty-five opposed.123

The closed sessions came to an end only after the Federalists believed themselves to have crafted legislation that might resolve the crisis in Algiers. A Republican member of Congress, Anthony New of Virginia, leaked news of this impending legislation to his constituents in January 1794 informing them that “by some it is thought, that a . . . fleet to force a peace from Algiers,” is sufficient “to protect commerce and assert our national rights; and votes have passed in the House of Representatives for these purposes.” With this legislation in place, the House finally lifted the ban on public access to discussion of Algiers in early February. This rule change opened the way for the Federalists to officially unveil their plan to bring an end to the crisis in Algiers, a military solution. The legislation called for “a naval force, to consist of four ships of 44, and two ships of 20

guns each, be provided for the protection of the commerce of the United States against Algerine cruisers.”

Federalist supporters of the legislation believed that such action was the only sure way to bring an end to a crisis that had failed to be successfully concluded through almost a decade of negotiation. Ironically, it had been Thomas Jefferson who had first called for a military solution when Algerian corsairs had seized American ships in 1785. Now it was the Federalists who argued in favor of a military solution. The Republicans, despite Jefferson’s earlier support for military action, were less enthusiastic about the planned use of force in the Mediterranean. Pointing to the government response to the Whiskey Rebellion, Republicans feared that such military power might be turned against the American people themselves. James Madison thought the money might be better spent to pay Portugal to defend American shipping against the Algerians, while New Jersey Congressman Abraham Clark feared that the creation of a navy was but the first step in a massive military expansion in the United States and an unchecked expansion of the power of the federal government.

In addition to the fears voiced by Madison and Clark, John Page of Virginia voiced opposition to the bill on a more practical level. “I cannot think that any measure we could adopt would be more grateful to our rivals in the commerce at which we are aiming, than an attempt to equip and keep in pay a naval force.” Page argued that the

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price of a navy would only grow once the United States became involved in a war with “the Barbarians of the East on their own element.” Page continued that “a considerable part of our constituents would prefer having their proportion of the sums which may be found necessary to purchase peace, or to redeem unhappy captives,” to the “warlike naval equipments proposed in the bill.” Page contended that the United States, in building a navy and expanding its military might, would be abandoning the “pacific disposition which it becomes an infant republic to cherish.” Beyond the needs of the nation as a whole, Page commented that he dreaded “the consequences of . . . a report [on an American navy] reaching the ears of those who hold our unhappy countrymen in chains. . . . Should the report of our naval armament reach the tyrant of Algiers, immediate death might be the consequence to some of the miserable prisoners; additional chains, and perhaps dungeons become the lot of the others.” The best course of action for a young republic in this situation to pursue, according to Page, was to appropriate a fund “for the redemption of unfortunate captives; and the ransom negotiated so, as to appear to the Regency of Algiers, as the result of private contributions and not as arising from an Act of the United States. If this could be done it would be far less expensive than the equipment of the 6 frigates; or the annual tributary payments, and would excite no jealousy at home or abroad.” Although the legislation for the creation of the navy passed, Page’s criticism struck a chord with many in the American public.126

126The Independent Gazetteer (Worcester), March 15, 1794. For a breakdown of the votes on this legislation see The Gazette of the United States (Philadelphia), February 21, 1794 and Dunlap’s Daily American Advertiser (Philadelphia) March 15, 1794.
As these critiques of the new legislation began to appear in the American press, supporters of this legislation refused to let them go unanswered. In a letter first published in the *Philadelphia Gazette*, “Warren” called on the “reasonable Citizens of the United States” to support the legislation and to willingly pay the requisite taxes. “Beware my fellow citizens, of those persons amongst us who excite you against a government which is straining every nerve to protect you against you enemies. . . If you see new comers clamoring against taxes and inflaming you against the government, you may justly suspect some sinister design.” Warren argued that such criticisms are a threat not only to domestic stability but to the nation’s very liberty:

> If when danger threatens from abroad, we are disunited at home, what will become of our independence?—rouse therefore, let every man contribute his share towards the defense of his country and reprobate those who, under the cloak of patriotism, are sapping the foundations of that excellent government, without which we shall soon fall prey to internal feuds and foreign invaders. The man who at this critical moment withholds his contributions, & thereby exposes the United States to ruin, shews clearly that while he pretends to patriotism, he is nothing better than a selfish interested person, worthy of public execration.\(^{127}\)

According to Warren, Americans could best secure their liberty through faith in their government and support of federal policy. Failure to support the government, both in their sentiment and payment of taxes, would lead to internal division and ultimately foreign invasion.

In arguing against public involvement, Warren was clinging to an older model of civic discourse in which the authoritative few spoke to the people and discouraged a larger public dialogue. Warren’s more traditional world view was echoed in the *American Minerva* and the *Gazette of the United States*. The newspapers published a piece which called on the American people to put their faith in the federal government.

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\(^{127}\) *The Western Star* (Stockbridge, MA), June 3, 1794.
and refrain participating in any of the popular clubs which were attempting to influence public policy. “We think it a duty at all times to state facts; and warn the public of dangers. We have repeatedly noticed in speculation the attempts of certain violent men and popular associations to dictate, direct, or in some measure, to influence the proceedings of government. We must now relate a fact that sets the danger of such attempts in strong point of view.” The article went on to argue that “soon after it was known that the Algerines had made prisoners of a number of our American seamen, government took the most effectual measures, and the most liberal means were provided to redeem those unfortunate men.” The blame for the failure of these efforts is placed squarely on the “misjudged and ill-timed benevolence of our own citizens, who by various means, have been endeavoring to raise money for the same purpose by voluntary contributions.” Such actions, the article contended led the Dey of Algiers to believe that no price was too high, that the American people would meet all of his demands. As a result, the government had been forced to keep its negotiations “private, this led people to suppose no measures had been taken to redeem the wretched captives and their humanity called for benevolent aid.” Such an appearance, however, was the creation of a “misguided zeal of some” and a “sinister view of others” that perpetually embarrassed “or wholly thwarted the operations of government. The mischiefs arising from this constant popular interference with the legislative and executive powers of government are innumerable.” Having chosen their representatives, the people must be satisfied that their government, acting with “the best means of information,” was developing the appropriate policy. This system breaks down when people enter into “private clubs,
transient associations, formed and acting on *partial or inaccurate* statements or facts, [and] undertake to direct and control the measures of the government. In short, they elect men to do business and then do it themselves, without means of knowing whether their steps are right or wrong.” If Americans were unwilling to trust the government and “have no confidence in our executive; if he is not permitted to manage negotiations, entrusted to him by the constitution and laws of the United States; we may as well dissolve the government at once and ‘every man to his tent, O Israel.’” Most significantly, “if Americans could have restrained their intemperate zeal, and let government conduct the business, our brethren in Algiers might probably have been, by this time, restored to their country.” While the author of the article did not doubt the intention of Americans, all they had done, “by those private aids” was “to thwart and perplex government.” Finally, if the people of the United States wished to see the captives in Algiers freed, and to see the American government continue to serve the best interest of the people, they should, “with great unanimity, reprobate all clubs formed to influence public measures, and consider them as unconstitutional and dangerous.”

Many in the federal government argued that any non-governmental efforts on behalf of the captives were misguided. Even Thomas Jefferson, in the earliest days of the crisis, had sought to limit public participation in the efforts to redeem the captives fearing that such actions would only encourage the Dey to increase his price. Acknowledging the diverse nature of the groups attempting to aid the captive sailors, opponents of private clubs argued that whatever their intention, their efforts only served to undercut American

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foreign policy. Public opinion, many Federalists believed, had no place in
government.\textsuperscript{129}

Despite efforts to bring an end to the private collections, both through legislation
and appeals in the press, these endeavors continued unabated through 1794. Although
Federalists had hoped that the American people would be satisfied with the planned
creation of a navy, non-governmental efforts only grew in the months that followed.
Sparked in part by the actions of the American diplomatic corps, the second half of 1794
saw the height of public efforts on behalf of the captives in Algiers. In June, the \textit{City
Gazette and Daily Advertiser} reported that at a celebration of the “President of the United
States . . . at Lisbon in the house of our minister there . . . a subscription of 1000 dollars
was completed for the relief of citizens of the United States in captivity in Algiers.”
Later that summer, John Pintard, the American consul at Madeira, addressed the
American Marine Society announcing that he would use the profits from the sale of wine
to members of their society to contribute to the relief of their “unfortunate fellow-citizens
who are in captivity at Algiers.”\textsuperscript{130}

Not all Federalists opposed the efforts to take up a collection to redeem the
captive sailors. David Humphreys, American Minster to Portugal, was one of the greatest
catalysts in foiling Federalist efforts to quiet public contributions to the redemptions of
the sailors at Algiers. Congress appointed Humphreys to negotiate a treaty with Algiers

\textsuperscript{129} Jefferson had secretly attempted to negotiated the release of the original twenty captured sailors through
a Catholic order based in France that was dedicated to redeeming Christian sailors enslaved in the Barbary
States. These efforts had come to an end when France descended into revolution.
\textsuperscript{130} The \textit{City Gazette and Daily Advertiser} (Charleston, SC), June 11, 1794; The Boston \textit{Gazette and
Country Journal}, December 8, 1794. Pintard’s proposal was greeted with a public acknowledgement and
order when James Farquhar announced his intention to purchase six pipes in a letter that was published in
the Boston \textit{Gazette} December 8, 1794.
in March 1793. Humphreys, a member of the Connecticut Wits, had served as George Washington’s aide during the Revolution and had accompanied him to Mount Vernon after the war. In 1790 he had traveled to Europe with John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin to report on the state of affairs in Europe. Following his appointment to Algiers, Humphreys worked through a number of channels in an effort to gain an audience with the Dey. Despite several attempts, Humphreys was never granted permission to negotiate for the release of the captives. Frustrated, Humphreys challenged official policy. He addressed a letter directly “to the People of the United States of America,” in October 1794, calling upon them to aid in the relief of the American prisoners at Algiers. “My dear Fellow Citizens, the Plague, that terrible scourge from Heaven now rages in Algiers. Our fellow citizens, at work with crowds in the marine by day, and confined in prison at night are much more exposed than persons who are at large to fall amongst its first victims.” Humphreys further explained that conditions were so bad for the American prisoners in Algiers that “death may at last be deemed less dreadful by the miserable remnant of survivors, than dereliction and despair.” Under such circumstances, Humphreys informed the American people that a change in policy needed to be made. “However wise or proper the policy might formerly have been to decline ransoming our citizens from slavery at Algiers, until a peace could be negotiated with that Regency; at present, it appears to me, the principal political reasons on which that policy was founded have ceased to exist.” Humphreys, the appointed American
representative to Algiers, questioned the course being pursued by Congress and the president. 131

Humphreys suggested that the quickest way to bring an end to the crisis was through a national lottery. Such a collection ought to take place to provide for the ransom of the American prisoners, “or if there should be any insuperable objections to that measure—it is to be hoped that the individual states will grant particular lotteries for the purpose. . . . Citizens of the United States of America! You have it in your power to rescue your forlorn fellow citizens from a premature death, which without your intervention in their favour, seems inevitable.” Published widely throughout the United States, Humphreys plan drew tremendous support. Although neither the federal nor state governments took up the idea of a lottery, many citizens viewed Humphreys’s letter as official sanction of non-governmental efforts to redeem American captives.132

Secretary of State Edmund Randolph was left with the task of reigning in the stampede caused by Humphreys’s plea. As Robert Allison has noted, “Randolph had the delicate task of reprimanding Humphreys while not alienating him, and refusing the

131American Minerva (New York), October 28, 1794; The Gazette of the United States (Philadelphia), October 31, 1794; Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), November 4, 1794; American Apollo (Boston), November 6, 1794; Catskill Packet (Catskill, NY), November 8, 1794; Western Star (Stockbridge, MA) November 11, 1794; City Gazette (Charleston, SC), November 19, 1794; Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), November 4, 1794; American Apollo (Boston), November 6, 1794; Catskill Packet (Catskill, NY), November 8, 1794; Western Star (Stockbridge, MA) November 11, 1794; City Gazette (Charleston, SC), November 19, 1794.
American people’s generosity while praising them for it.” In an attempt to limit public response, Randolph reported that the Humphreys’s lottery was unnecessary as the government had already set aside $800,000 to secure the release of the captives. Such assurances from the government, however, did little to quell the popular uprising. Humphreys’s letter only fanned the flames of public sentiment that had been ignited as early as 1783.  

With Humphreys’s semi-official sanction, plans were made across the United States to take up a collection to redeem the American captives at Algiers. A letter, signed Essex, appeared in the *Salem Gazette* noting that “the address . . . conveys so much sympathy, philanthropy, virtue, and, I may add, pity, that I doubt whether there is one of the addressed but what joins with me in approbating a theme that sets my soul on fire.” For many, Humphreys’s letter offered an opening for the American people to display their true character. When Washington called for a day of national thanksgiving in February 1795, those who had been working to redeem the captive sailors made use of the occasion.  

Although earlier efforts had centered on private donations and private efforts at redemption, Humphreys’s letter and the national day of thanksgiving, provided an opportunity to integrate the public and private. Recognizing the opportunity, private relief groups issued an elaborate call for “a continental contribution for the relief of our American Brethren in captivity at Algiers.” The collections were to be forwarded to “the Treasurer of the Union at Philadelphia to be by him appropriated to the purpose.

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134 The *Salem Gazette* (MA), November 25, 1794.
aforesaid.” The call for the collection reminded Americans of the names of the ships which had been seized and called on Americans to “transport yourselves in idea, to the City of Algiers; leave behind you the tenderest charities of life . . . fancy that you are prisoners, in chains, condemned to life long toil . . . goaded to labor by the uplifted scourge. . . and unrelentingly confined with the subjects of pestilential disease.” The organizers of the national collection asked how Americans could “forget the greatest of all possible calamities, which rests on the wearied heads of [their] fellow citizens.” The American people must not ignore the plight of their captive countrymen. “We are convinced, by a thousand examples, that the sons of Freedom are forever prompt to relieve the wretched.” The authors of the plan call on Americans to make “the 19th day of February 1795 . . . a day never to be forgotten in the annals of philanthropy . . . for this was the day which gave liberty, happiness, domestick joys to all the American Captives in slavery at Algiers.”

As if to underscore the need for the people to contribute to the relief of the American captives, newspapers throughout the country republished a letter from John Lamb who claimed that his efforts to redeem the American captives had failed because the American government had not been able to supply him with enough money to obtain their release. Lamb’s letter, dated 20 January 1793, emphasized the need for the American people to become involved in the affairs of government. If Lamb was to be believed, the only way to redeem the American captives was through ransom that the

135 The Impartial Herald (Newburyport, MA), January 23, 1795; Providence Gazette (RI), January 31, 1795; Newport Mercury (RI), February 3, 1795; Massachusetts Spy or Worcester Gazette (MA), February 4, 1795; Connecticut Gazette (New London), February 19, 1795.
government could not afford on its own. Redemption of the prisoners was truly up to the American people.\textsuperscript{136}

No member of the federal government directly refuted the effort to connect the day of thanksgiving with a national collection. Despite this tacit approval, almost immediately after the call for a national collection was published, reports began to appear of a possible settlement in Algiers. These reports centered on David Humphreys’s return to Newport. It was further reported that he was on his way to Philadelphia to meet with Washington. While the reasons for Humphreys’s return were unclear, it was rumored that Humphreys carried with him “important communications to THE PRESIDENT,” which it was believed might “unfold some interesting intelligence of the captives at Algiers.” Such reports, however, were unfounded as Humphreys had returned only to receive instructions on how to proceed, having failed to receive any instructions following his initial rebuff from the Dey. While the motivation of these reports may have been out of a belief that Humphreys’s return to the United States portended and end to the conflict with Algiers, it may also have been an indirect attempt to subvert the national collection. The premature reports of peace were corrected shortly after the day of thanksgiving, when a retraction ran in several newspapers reporting that the information which supposedly “came from the government” and reported that “there are very

\textsuperscript{136} The New Hampshire Gazette (Portsmouth) February 3, 1795; The Boston Gazette, February 16, 1795; Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), February 23, 1795; City Gazette (Charleston, SC), February 27, 1795.
favourable prospects, that a Peace with Algiers will be concluded” was not actually from any official source and no such peace was imminent.137

While reports of a settlement may have undercut that thanksgiving collection slightly, supporters of the effort continued to advertise their cause in the days leading up to the collection. A meeting of one of the aid societies in Marblehead recommended to local ministers that they “distinguish the approaching day of public thanksgiving, by a contribution to the relief of our American brethren, who are at this moment dragging the chains of slavery at Algiers, that city of bondage and of death.” A letter from William Penrose, captain of the captured ship the President, was published in several newspapers, stating that “the Dey hath given permission for any person to come forward on the part of the United States to effect the redemption of the Americans in captivity in this place. Nay, he even fervently wishes to be upon good terms with America.” The belief that the Dey was willing to negotiate may have served as encouragement, suggesting that donated funds could be put to use immediately. Penrose, however, went further arguing that “if something is not done soon we may as well give up every idea of liberty, and sink under the pressure of the most abject and cruel slavery.” He continued that such a fate could not be possible as “America the freest country upon earth [could not] suffer her citizens, who have fought and bled to establish & secure that liberty, to languish out a miserable existence in chains and the most abject slavery.” With the opening provided by

137 The Columbian Centinel (Boston), February 7, 1795; Parker, Uncle Sam in Barbary, 91-95; American Minerva (New York), February 27, 1795; Federal Intelligencer 24 February 1795; Columbian Centinel (Boston), February 28, 1795; see also Allison The Crescent Obscured 143-144.
Humphreys’s letter, supporters of the idea rushed to take full advantage of the situation.\textsuperscript{138}

Ministers throughout New England moved in support of the national collection. On the Sunday before the day of thanksgiving, Isaac Story delivered a sermon to his New London congregation entitled \textit{A Discourse . . . as Preparatory to the Collection, on the National Thanksgiving, the Thursday Following, for the Benefit of Our American Brethren at Algiers}. Story informed those who were listening “that a small sum from each hand would accomplish [the captives] redemption.” With that in mind, he called on those listening to consider the felicity, of which their ransom will be productive.” Dwelling on these notions, Story asked that if his audience “are sincere friends of [their] country . . . and would experience the consolatory assistance of the holy spirit in a dying hour, [to] open your hearts, and open your hands to these deserving objects.” On the day of thanksgiving itself the Episcopal Bishop of Connecticut and Rhode Island called collections “for the relief of our brethren in captivity at Algiers” to be taken up on coming Sundays in addition to the national collection on the day of thanksgiving. Such actions, the Bishop hoped, “will become general among Christians of all denominations in the United States of America.” Despite efforts to downplay the need for a national collection, the non-governmental efforts on behalf of the captives seemed to become further entrenched following the national day of thanksgiving.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{138} The New Hampshire Gazette (Portsmouth), February 17, 1795; Greenleaf’s New York Journal (New York), February 7, 1795; The Salem Gazette (MA), February 17, 1795; The New Hampshire Gazette (Portsmouth), February 17, 1795.
\textsuperscript{139} A Discourse Delivered February 15, 1795 . . . for the Benefit of Our American Brethren at Algiers (Salem, 1795); The Connecticut Gazette (New London), February 19, 1795.
News of the collection’s success was reported throughout the Northeast. “We hear from Berwick that the Rev. Mr. Thompson . . . has stirred up the pure minds of his congregation to contribute liberally, and we wait with impatience to hand the names of some very philanthropic individuals to their admiring countrymen. Many other religious societies have also voted to contribute on this charitable occasion.” One Bostonian “generously gave FOUR THOUSAND DOLLARS,” a sum sufficient to procure the redemption of a master.” In Maine reports of “the late Thanksgiving day” noted that “in Thomastown, 106 dollars were collected. In Cushing on that day and since, they have collected about 60 dollars,” and at a town meeting in Warren it was reported that 100 dollars had been collected. “We had not a rich man in the town, and yet 10 dollars came from one hand.” In “the little plantation of Maduncook,” a handsome sum had also been raised. The town of Bristol was reported to have collected between 200 and 300 dollars, while the towns of “Waldoborough, Union, and some other places,” have scheduled their collections for an April meeting. So widespread had the effort become that in Portland it was reported that “the society of Friends in this neighborhood are to contribute at their next meeting” and a Dutch reformed congregation in Albany gave $130. With the spread of collection efforts, public participation in the efforts to redeem the American captives had reached new heights, even as Congress prepared a military solution.  

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140 Dunlap’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), March 3, 1795; The New Hampshire Gazette (Portsmouth), March 10, 1795; Spooner’s Vermont Journal (Windsor), March 16, 1795; see also Allison, The Crescent Obscured. My interpretation of the success of the collection efforts differ from Allison’s. Allison contends that “the thanksgiving day was a failure as a charity,” however, in the face of the Congressional efforts to bring an end to the crisis through military means, the wide spread collections were a strong indication that many citizens had little faith in a naval solution to the crisis.
By the 1790s, all of the pieces necessary for an expansive sphere were in place in the United States and it was issues of foreign policy that would put it to the test. The crisis in Algiers helped focus national attention and laid the foundation for an expansive debate that would stretch beyond the borders of the United States to the shores of North Africa. In addition to its broad participation, this debate shaped the dynamic that was emerging between the newly created federal government and the American people. Despite the efforts of many within the federal government to limit access to the debate, active members of the American public were unwilling to be shut out. Even as the Federalist members of Congress sought to bring an end to the debate by legislating a military solution to the crisis, a growing number of concerned citizens continued their efforts to raise funds to secure the release of the prisoners at Algiers.

As early as the spring of 1794, Washington, hoping to appease the public outcry, requested that Hamilton explore the possibility of acquiring a foreign loan to allow the U.S. Government to secure the release of hostages in Algiers. Although the eighty-five captive sailors who survived Algerian captivity would not return to the United States until February 1797, it was as the result of negotiations and the payment of $200,000 in gold rather than the threat of an American navy that secured their release. Despite the efforts of members of the federal government to limit public involvement on the matter of the Algiers, the developing American public sphere allowed a wide range of participation in the debate. In the press, on the stage, in the taverns, and in the streets Americans made their voices heard on the issue of Algiers. While many Federalist members of Congress
and in the Washington administration ultimately favored a military solution, it was ultimately the solution supported by a wide cross-section of the American public that secured the release of the American captives at Algiers.¹⁴¹

Through petitions, letters, newspapers, and even the theater, Americans demonstrated their involvement in national affairs. From the captive sailors themselves to members of Congress, almost every sector of American society played some role in the debate over Algiers. Numerous groups emerged to raise funds for the fellow citizens trapped in captivity, hoping to demonstrate the depth of the American character. Members of Democratic-Republican societies, recognizing the power of the public efforts on behalf of the captive in Algiers, were quick to adopt the cause as one of their own, championing the voice of the people. Members of Congress also came to recognize the power of this movement. Republican congressmen sought to facilitate citizen participation by opening government proceedings to a wider audience. Even the many Federalists initially opposed to the public efforts, eventually recognized the power of a motivated citizenry. It was a recognition of the power of these active citizens that prepared the Federalists for the fight over the ratification of the Jay Treaty a year later. While a recent study has argued that the debate surrounding the Jay Treaty “altered the entire political system within which the nascent parties operated,” it seems that the

¹⁴¹George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, May 29, 1794, Washington Papers (Library of Congress, Washington, DC). See also Kitzen Tripoli and the United States at War, 17-19. The money was acquired with the assistance of British bankers in Lisbon and Jewish bankers in Algiers. See Parker, Uncle Sam in Barbary, 116-123.
The mobilization of public opinion around the Jay Treaty was part of an emerging political culture that had begun as early as 1783.\textsuperscript{142}

The crisis in Algiers demonstrated the viability of an expansive public sphere in the United States. Despite the efforts of Federalist members of Congress, it was the solution backed by a vocal citizenry that won out. The crisis in Algiers revealed that the voices of the American people were not simply a source to be consulted from time to time to resolve constitutional issues or during elections. These vocal Americans revealed the power of persuasion in the public sphere. In making their voices heard, these citizens not only set the term of the debate, but directed the American government to a negotiated rather than a military settlement. The crisis in Algiers demonstrated that any issue of national significance required the approval of an active citizenry engaged in an “extensive sphere.”

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On May 26, 1797, John Adams laid before the Senate “a treaty of perpetual peace and friendship between the United States of America and the Bey and subjects of Tripoli, of Barbary, concluded at Tripoli, on the 4th day of November, 1796.”\textsuperscript{143} The treaty, which had been negotiated by Joel Barlow in the wake of the American settlement with Algiers, was ratified by the Senate just over a week later. Coming as part of a wave of similar settlements with the other Barbary States, the American people greeted the news


\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Journal of the Executive Proceedings of the Senate of the United States}, May 29, 1797.
of the settlement with approbation. Despite the successful negotiations, relations with the
North African nations continued to play a prominent role in American politics in the
decades that followed. Throughout the Jefferson administration, the fate of American
sailors abroad continued as a constant source of anxiety and debate.144

The realm of presidential politics was one of the first areas in which American
relations with the Barbary States made a return to the national scene. In the vitriolic
campaign leading up to the election of 1800 supporters of both Adams and Jefferson
leveled a range of charges against the opposing side. One of the most common means of
attack was to question the piety of the candidates. Adams’s supporters attacked Jefferson
labeling him an atheist. Jefferson’s supporters countered such charges invoking the
eleventh article of the treaty with Tripoli as evidence that it was Adams and not Jefferson
who was the ungodly candidate. “Mr. Adams,” declared one Jefferson supporter, “has
made a treaty with the Bey of Tripoli (an infidel and piratical state) in which he declares,
that the constitution of the United States is, in no sense, founded on the Christian
religion.” While the attack on Adams was not a fair assessment of his religious beliefs,
the interpretation of article eleven was a reasonable summary. The treaty declared that
“as the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the
Christian Religion,-as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or
tranquility of Musselmen,-and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of
hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising
from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing

144 The Philadelphia Gazette & Universal Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), June 17, 1797.

As Americans debated the intent of the treaty with Tripoli, the bashaw of Tripoli began his own revision of the document. In the original settlement, Tripoli had agreed to defer to oversight from Algiers in the case of dispute with the United States. Article Twelve declared that any disagreement between the United States and Tripoli would been mediated by the dey of Algiers. Frustrated with such an arrangement and an accompanying lower rate of tribute, the bashaw increased his demand for annual tribute. If the Americans failed to comply, the bashaw warned, he would resume cruising against American shipping in the Mediterranean. When the Americans failed to comply, Tripoli made good on the threat resuming attacks on American shipping in March of 1801. Jefferson, who had opposed the build up of a naval force during the Adams administration, called for a military response to the Tripolitanian threat. He believed that a few American warships dispatched to the Mediterranean, with crews seasoned by their experience in the recent Quasi-War with France, would be a fearsome enough presence to force the bashaw to negotiate. So confident were the members of the Jefferson administration in the power of the American navy, that they ordered the American consul at Tripoli to “stifle every pretension or expectation, that the United States . . .will make
the smallest contribution . . . as the price of peace.” Jefferson and Madison believed that, with relatively little effort, the Barbary threat could be eliminated once and for all.\footnote{Miller, ed., Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America. Lambert, The Barbary Wars, 123-126. Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers, Vol. 2, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 126-127. When first faced with demand for tribute from the North African states in 1785, Jefferson argued that the United States would best be served by standing up to the Barbary States and refusing to pay any tribute. “I was very unwilling,” he reported “that we should acquiesce in the European humiliation of paying tribute to those lawless pirates, and endeavored to form an association of the powers subject to the habitual depredation from them.” Jefferson to Adams, 11 July 1786 in The Adams and Jefferson Letters, 142.}

Despite Jefferson’s optimism, the United States became embroiled in the very type of conflict that Adams, in recommending against a military response to the Algerian threat, had predicted more than a decade earlier. Although the American forces scored early victories, the hope that Tripoli would be quick to sue for peace was shattered as Tripoli’s shallow-draft vessels managed to avoid the American blockade. Navigating the shoals, the smaller Tripolitan vessels maintained a steady supply of food and ammunition to their besieged country. In addition to the failing blockade, the United States also faced the threat of renewed violence from the other North African nations. Rather than bringing an end to the Tripolitan threat, the blockade had strained American relations with all of the Barbary States. While the United States saw its position in the Mediterranean weakened by the blockade, Tripoli managed to expand its power in the face of the American threat. Negotiations between Tripoli and several European states had resulted in new sources of income and allowed the nation to acquire two new corsairs of fourteen and sixteen guns respectively. A year into the American blockade of Tripoli
it was the United States that found itself wary of the growing military might of its opponent. 147

Federalists used the failed blockade as fodder for their attacks on Jefferson, noting that while the administration believed that America’s reputation had improved in the eyes of nations around the world, “we are much at a loss as to know where to find them.” Federalist challengers inquired “Is it France, is it Britain, is it Spain, or Algiers, Tripoli and the whole host of Barbarians that so highly respect us?” The Federalists charged the United States had not improved its standing with any nation under the Jefferson administration. Instead, they argued, “other nations are either availing themselves or preparing to avail themselves of our feeble and short-sighted policy.” Despite Jefferson’s hope that American military might be used to the quell the Barbary threat and improve the standing of the United States in the Atlantic World, the conflict with Tripoli only served to highlight American weakness. 148

The low point in the conflict with Tripoli occurred as Jefferson prepared to stand for re-election. In pursuit of Barbary cruisers, the American frigate Philadelphia ran aground just off the coast of Tripoli. Trapped on the shoals, the crew of the Philadelphia was forced to surrender to a smaller Tripolitanian force. All 307 American crewmen were imprisoned and the Philadelphia itself was recommissioned The Gift of Allah in service of the defense of Tripoli. Encouraged by this victory, the bashaw increased his demands further to include a ransom of $1000 for each captive sailor. Seeing an

147 Lambert, The Barbary Wars, 123-146. In 1786, discussing the use of military force against the Barbary States, Adams had warned Jefferson, “We ought not fight them at all, unless we determine to fight them forever.” Adams to Jefferson, 31 July 1786 in The Adams and Jefferson Letters, 146.
148 Gazette of the United States (Philadelphia, PA), October 4, 1802.
opportunity to score political points, the Federalists were quick to employ news of the capture of the Philadelphia in their attacks on Jefferson. “The present administration boast loudly of its wisdom, as well economy” the Newburyport Herald reported, “But the loss of the frigate Philadelphia, is a poor comment on either. Had there been a single tender in company that frigate, we should not have to deplore the face of above Three Hundred of our countrymen in slavery. Now the mischief is done.” Others labeled Jefferson as the leader of a “weak and pusillanimous administration,” and decried his failure as commander in chief. To the Federalists the loss of the Philadelphia was a clear sign of Jefferson’s failure as president.  

Republicans were quick to Jefferson’s defense. “That party malevolence should undertake to lug in the loss of the Philadelphia as an evil which might have been avoided is indeed truly ridiculous. To think of charging it to the account of the President is malicious, is despicable. A mere accident; an accident which no man could possibly foresee, much less prevent.” Additionally, they argued, once this “mere accident” had occurred Jefferson had moved quickly in shepherding through Congress legislation authorizing the construction of a fleet of ships and gunboats suited for combat in the shallows off Tripoli.

A key component of Jefferson’s military buildup, however, was the source of funding for the new vessels. Determine to prevent unchecked growth of the military, Jefferson refused to borrow money to build up the fleet. Instead, Jefferson created a special tax of two and a half percent on American merchants trading in the

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150 Political Calendar (Newburyport, MA), April 9, 1804. Lambert, The Barbary Wars, 140-141.
Mediterranean. This tax was only to remain in effect until the conflict with Tripoli was resolved. With such a maneuver, Jefferson was able to square his ideology and earlier opposition to the expansion of the military with the realities of office.  

Within a month news of the loss of the Philadelphia was replaced by news of the destruction of the captured ship. Republicans were quick to turn the counter-offensive to their advantage. “I now have the pleasure of informing you of the destruction of the frigate Philadelphia, by an action most daring, and perhaps attended with a success as brilliant as any recorded in naval history.” Disguised as Turkish sailors, the American forces had sailed into Tripoli’s harbor and boarded the Philadelphia before an alarm could be raised. Once aboard the ship, the American crew destroyed the vessel setting it ablaze and retreating to a safe distance. From there, “they saw the frigate burn to the water’s edge, her cables burnt off, and the bottom drift on shore near the Bashaw’s castle.” What followed, according to an officer aboard the USS Constitution, was a “scene of terror and confusion in Tripoli” that was “beyond description.” The successful raid on the Philadelphia served as a turning point in the conflict and served to revive flagging public sentiment over the war. In accounts published around the United States it was noted that “the importance of this bold and intrepid enterprise, to the commerce of American must be acknowledged very great; but what affords the highest satisfaction is, that we have lost, in this action, not a single man.” The National Intelligencer declared that they had hoped “the gallant conduct of our seamen in the Mediterranean,” would have “produced one common feeling throughout the land,” however, it was clear that

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since “our tars have dared to manifest under the administration of Mr. Jefferson a bravery and enterprise certainly unsurpassed,” that the Federalists denied their “measure of applause.” Apart from the partisan bickering, however, the destruction of the Philadelphia sparked an explosion of national pride.152

In the months that followed, American forces in the Mediterranean pressed their advantage. In a series of assaults on Tripoli, along with a raid on the fort at Derne to the east, the American forces managed to force the bashaw to negotiate. The initial demand from Tripoli was a settlement of $200,000 from the United States in return for its captured sailors and an end to hostilities. The American negotiator, Tobias Lear, rejected the offer out of hand. The bashaw eventually settled on a payment of $60,000 for the return of the captives, and as Lear noted, “not a cent for peace.” Republicans celebrated the victory, making special note of reports that the bashaw had been reading American newspapers which had been sent to the captives and had been discouraged by reports of the success of the Mediterranean tax which Jefferson had levied for prosecution of the war. Faced with such reports, the Republicans argued, the bashaw “saw that the spirit of the American nation was yet unbroken” and realized that he must soon come to terms.153

Regardless of party affiliation, Americans celebrated the victory in Tripoli. The Aurora General Advertiser noted that the United States expedition in North Africa “is now closed,” and with its successful conclusion “the nation has excited the esteem and admiration of European nations, and the respect and fear of those Barbary.” From

Richmond, news that the imprisoned crew of the *Philadelphia* had safely returned home elicited a massive celebration, commemorating an event “which has given liberty to our own countrymen and glory to our arms.” A celebration in Philadelphia included not only the standard toasts, but a series of paintings commemorating the American victory. “In one view the frigate Philadelphia wrapt in flames, and the ketch Intrepid, (by which this gallant exploit was achieved) bearing off from the scene of glory.” Another painting “consisted of the American Eagle, holding a sword pendant in his talons, and in her a bill a label, with the inscription, ‘the gratitude of a country the reward of merit.’—On a roll below it was inscribed, in letters of gold, the Resolution of Congress, voting a sword to Captain Decatur for his gallant conduct in the destruction of the frigate Philadelphia.” At a theater in New York, “The Historical Tragedy of Bunker Hill” was performed along with “TARS FROM TRIPOLI or A Tribute of Respect to the MEDITERRANEAN HEROS.” On stage, the victory in Tripoli stood on equal ground with the triumph of the American Revolution. Despite standing political divisions, the victory in Tripoli served to stoke American pride and revive American self-confidence.\(^{154}\)

Emboldened by the success in Tripoli, Jefferson sought to increase American access to British markets. Jefferson instructed James Monroe, the American emissary in England to attempt to negotiate a treaty that granted the U.S. most favored nation status, established trade reciprocity, and brought an end to British intrusions on American neutrality. Despite Monroe’s efforts, both England and France continued to limit

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American access to European markets. In addition to limiting American access to trade in European ports, American sailors became potential targets for impressment into the French and British navies. Faced with this threat, Jefferson knew the United States was to be denied the trade promised by the American victory in Tripoli. Unlike the conflict with the Barbary States, Jefferson knew the United States could not hope to outgun the Royal Navy. “Under the new law of the Ocean,” Jefferson conceded, “our trade in the Mediterranean has been swept away by seizures and condemnations.” The joy and self-confidence spurred by the victory in Tripoli had given way to anxiety in the face of the threat of impressment.  

Jefferson responded to the threat with an American embargo. Jefferson’s hope was that the loss of the American trade would convince Parliament to put a stop to the harassment of American ships and the impressment of American sailors. The policy was divisive from the first, but Jefferson managed to convince Congress to pass the requisite legislation in December 1807. Despite American intentions, the embargo had little impact on England, while bringing the economy in the Northeastern United States to a halt. The initial opposition to Jefferson’s policy was soon joined by Republican representatives from New York and Pennsylvania. In addition to the economic crisis

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155 The Works of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Paul Ford, vol. 10 (New York, 1904), 516. Lambert, The Barbary Wars, 170-178. The issue of impressment was made doubly complex by the issue of citizenship. Port of registry for a given ship did not assure the citizenship of all crewmen. In several cases sailors who fled British military service were American sailors seeking to return to their home country. For more on the evolution of the idea of American citizenship in this era see Rogers M. Smith, Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) and James H. Kettner, The Development of American Citizenship (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978). Kettner’s examination of the shifting balance between state and federal citizenship offers a context for Federalist-Republican debate over the fate of foreign born sailors on American ships who were taken captive by the British. An extended consideration of this debate is included in Chapter Four.
brought on by the embargo, the successes in the Mediterranean following the conflict with Tripoli were soon reversed.\textsuperscript{156}

With the embargo in place, the American warships which had remained in the Mediterranean were ordered home. The removal of the American fleet left those Americans ships who were still engaged in trade vulnerable to attack. With the departure of the American force, the dey of Algiers declared the United States to be delinquent in their annual tribute and Algerian corsairs resumed their attacks on American shipping. Within a matter of months three American ships, the \textit{Eagle}, the \textit{Violet}, and the \textit{Mary Ann}, had become victims of the latest incarnation of the Barbary threat. Lacking a military option, the United States was quick to pursue a negotiated settlement. Tobias Lear quickly offered “the amount of two years annuities . . . in cash” for the release of the sailors. Despite the quick resolution of the crisis, the American success in Tripoli was quickly fading into memory. In the face of British harassment, the United States was once again revealed to be a second class citizen in the Atlantic world. With the failure of Jefferson’s embargo to protect American shipping from both European and African threats, the attention of the American sought an alternate means to bring an end to the threat of British impressment.\textsuperscript{157}

\textsuperscript{156} Lambert, \textit{The Barbary Wars}, 176-178.

Figure 1: Early American Newspaper Database Coverage of the Conflict with Tripoli and the Impressment of American Sailors 1794-1816 (See Appendix A)
CHAPTER 4

“FLOATING HELLS OF OLD ENGLAND”: THE PRISONER DEBATE AND FEDERALIST OPPOSITION TO THE WAR OF 1812

The course and tenor of the War of 1812 was fundamentally shaped by the plight of prisoners of war. This conflict, which many have come to call “America’s second war of independence,” led to the imprisonment of nearly 20,000 American soldiers and sailors. Throughout the conflict the debate over the plight of American prisoners of war was a key component of national politics. Both Federalists and Republicans used debates over the fate their imprisoned countrymen as a proxy for a larger debate over the future of the United States. Republicans argued that British treatment of American prisoners demanded that the United States rise to the occasion and defend their rights. For the Federalists, American policies toward prisoners of war were symptomatic of a Republican power grab that put the United States on a course toward tyranny. An examination of this debate offers insight into the Federalist Party’s last legitimate push to be a part of national politics. The debate over the treatment of prisoners of war during the War of 1812 reveals much about how the Federalists understood their place on the national stage in years leading up to the Hartford Convention.158

158 While War of 1812 is often discussed in terms of sectional differences with New England shipping interests opposing the conflict, while Southern and Western interests sought to protect American sailors and western settlers from British and Native American attacks, an examination of the historiography reveals a political interpretation structured along party lines to be more accurate. Roger H. Brown’s The Republic in Peril: 1812 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964) presents the coming of war as a continuation of the partisan differences of the 1790s. Donald Hickey’s The War of 1812: The Forgotten Conflict (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) contends that although the Republican party had come to dominate
In the build up to the war, both supporters and detractors used the issue of impressment in making their case for or against military action. Republican proponents of war saw impressment as a fundamental attack on American liberties, which not only enslaved American sailors, but left families of these sailors destitute. Federalist opponents of the war highlighted French abuse of sailors’ rights and even went as far as blaming Madison’s behavior as justification of British actions. Once the conflict had begun, the Madison administration’s policy of “retaliation” sparked a national debate over the right of prisoners of war and the character of the American people. Republicans argued that retaliation would hasten the end of the conflict, while Federalists argued that such action violated American principles and would only lead to increased penalty for captive Americans at British hands.159

At the core of the debate over the treatment of prisoners lay fundamentally different understandings the legacy of the American Revolution and the place of the United States in the larger world. The political divisions between the pro-British Federalists and pro-French Republicans in the years before the War of 1812 has received a great deal of attention, however, the realities of war altered these divisions in ways that national politics after the election of 1800, it was a resurgent Federalist Party that offered a more rational and reasoned approach to international relations as the Republicans rushed to war. Jeffrey Pasley, “The Tyranny of the Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001) offers some insight into the nature of the partisan divide during this period as it played out in the press. The most recent work on this period is Richard Buel Jr.’s American on the Brink: How the Political Struggle over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic (New York: Palgrave, 2005). Buel places much of the blame for the conflict on the Federalists, arguing that their attempts to subvert the national government forced that nation to war. Other works worth examining include J. C. A. Stagg, Mr. Madison’s War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic, 1783-1830 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) and John K. Mahon, War of 1812 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1982).

159 As mentioned above, within this debate over the plight of prisoners was a debate over the definition of American citizenship. As will be discussed below, part of the debate over the treatment of prisoners revolved around British authority to try British-born prisoners who had been captured fighting for the Americans as traitors. See Rogers M. Smith, Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History and James H. Kettner, The Development of American Citizenship.
have not been fully explored. The tone of American politics was fundamentally altered by the Baltimore riots in the summer of 1812. To the Federalists, Republican efforts to silence dissent, in part through mob violence, threatened to destroy the legacy of the Revolution and the Constitutional settlement. While Federalist dissent was present from the earliest days of the conflict, the Baltimore riots helped clarify Federalist opposition. Following the Baltimore riots, Federalists saw themselves as defenders of the Republic and when the Madison administration initiated a policy of retaliation, Federalists charged that the legacy of the American Revolution was being replaced by that of the French Revolution with Madison serving as an American Bonaparte.

The Federalist Party, whose power was greatly diminished after the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800, found new life following the economic and diplomatic miscues of the Jefferson administration and in the build up to the War of 1812. In denouncing the war as ill fated and painting the Republicans as would-be tyrants the Federalists found a unifying theme that allowed them to regain a voice in national politics. No issue offered the Federalists a greater opportunity to decry the tyrannical nature of the Madison administration than the policy of retaliation. As Madison and other Republicans threatened to punish and execute prisoners of war in retaliation for British atrocities, Federalists decried these actions as uncivilized and un-American. In the national debate over the treatment of prisoners of war, the Federalists presented themselves as defenders of American values, not as traitorous tories defending British interests. The Federalist defense of American values culminated with the Hartford Convention. Even as Republicans denounced the convention as a move toward secession, many Federalists saw the Convention as an effort to protect their liberties and
reestablish a Federalist presence in national politics. The Convention was, however, ill-timed and in the wake of the Treaty of Ghent and the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans, Federalist momentum was lost. This turn of events allowed the Republicans to label the Federalists as a party which was utterly out of sync with the nation, even as the Federalists saw themselves as defenders of American liberty. An examination of the debate over the treatment of prisoners of war offers insight into this shifting political landscape of the United States during the War of 1812.  

James Madison’s first term in office was very much shaped by policies that he had helped put in place under the Jefferson administration. Although the Napoleonic Wars had, in many ways, been a boon for the United States, attacks on American shipping by both the French and the English left the United States in a vulnerable position. Unwilling and unable to respond militarily, Jefferson and Madison responded to the threat with the Embargo Act of 1807, essentially closing American ports to foreign trade. From the beginning of his administration, Madison was faced with the consequences of Jefferson’s embargo. The embargo drove the nation into a deep economic depression and rejuvenated the Federalist party as they led the protest against the disastrous policy. Finally, in May of 1810, Congress replaced the embargo with Macon’s Bill #2 which reopened trade with both France and England but only on the condition that American trade vessels be allowed safe passage across the Atlantic. While Napoleon promised to respect the neutral rights of American ships, the English government, suspecting the French promise was little more than a ruse, refused to do the same. In response, Congress reopened trade with France, while passing a non-

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160 See Pasley, *The Tyranny of the Printers* 351-352.
importation act on British goods. Following the passage of this second non-importation act, relations with the English further deteriorated in the months that followed. In the face of this growing discord, an increasing number of Republicans began to discuss the possibility of war. Those who supported such a course of action argued that, while war was indeed a serious step, all other alternatives had been tried. In a letter to John Quincy Adams, William Plumer of New Hampshire later argued that “negociation & commercial restrictions failed to obtain redress, submission or war were the only remaining alternatives.”\footnote{William Plumer to John Quincy Adams, 18 August 1812 in the Plumer Papers at the Library of Congress; Hickey, \textit{The War of 1812}, 19-27.}

As many Republicans became increasingly convinced that war was the only method by which Americans might redeem their national honor, the issue of impressment served as one of the focal points of national debate. Within the administration, impressment was seen as “a practice which has so strong a bearing on our neutrality and to which no nation can submit consistently with its independence.” At the international level, members of the administration called on British officials to end the practice of impressment. In a diplomatic dispatch from William Pinkney to Britain’s Lord Wellesely, which appeared in newspapers throughout the United States, Pinkney called on England to respect American maritime rights. Responding to the seizure of four American sailors by the British ship \textit{Africa} in the autumn of 1810, Pinkney commented that such attacks were “characterized by an utter disregard of the rights of the American government, and by the oppression of its citizens.” Official denunciation of British actions extended beyond the federal level. Governor John Tyler, in an address to the Virginia Legislature, labeled England as an aggressor against American rights.
“America,” he stated, had “been continually groaning under oppressions of every sort, and a never ceasing invasion of her national rights ever since her act of Independence,” as a result of “adjudications, impressments, and paper blockades.” Tyler’s speech found a national audience and was republished in newspapers throughout the United States.  

The growing critique of British actions was not solely the realm of government officials. In a letter to the *Boston Patriot*, which was widely reprinted, “Volunteer” declared that the “British defender of the faith” in allowing “impressment” had simply given a new name to “the Infidel practice of MAN STEALING.” This renaming, Volunteer argued, was “an abuse of language” which “veiled from the great mass of an unscrutinizing nation, the rank offense of its rulers.” While the renaming of this grand offense may have been enough for the people of England, Volunteer argued that it could not be enough for the American people. No matter what term was used, American “seamen, the stolen goods . . . are still in possession of the thief; and it is the duty of every man, in whose veins runs a drop of American blood, to make perpetual claim of our right to raise the hue and cry against the felon ‘till we obtain indemnify for the past and security for the future.” Volunteer concluded his letter calling for Congress to act, noting that six years earlier a Congressman from Maryland had introduced legislation that would have protected “the personal rights of our seamen,” but that Congress had failed to pass this legislation. “Had this bill passed to a law, and the defence of our brave tars had been

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162 *Eastern Argus* (Portland, ME), January 3, 1811. *Alexandria Daily Gazette* (VA), January 8, 1811, also in *Republican Farmer* (Bridgeport, CT), January 9, 1811; *The Bee* (Hudson, NY), January 18, 1811; and the *Essex Register* (Salem, MA), Jan 19, 1811. *New Hampshire Patriot* (Concord, NH), January 8, 1811.
committed to their own hands, they would have done justice to themselves and avenged our disgrace.”

In another letter to the *Essex Register*, “S” drew parallels between the plight of the American captives in Algiers and the plight of Americans impressed into British service. “What must the feelings of the American Government be, when they have certain knowledge that more than 3000 natives of these United States have been impressed, and are now suffering on the ‘Floating Hells of Old England’ such cruelties as would disgrace the national character of the Algerines!” While, “S” noted, “Algerine slavery is both hard and cruel,” it is “nothing comparatively speaking to British slavery. For evidence of British cruelty on need look no further than almost any sailor who had managed to escape the “clutches” of the English. These former captives display “their scars, or tell of ‘scenes that fill the mind with horror!” Faced with such evidence, “S” argued that “it is time the American government should demand the liberation of this invaluable class of our citizens.” The need for government action seemed dire as “many destitute widows have been deprived of their only hope of comfort and support, and many families have been thrown by British tyranny and impressment, from a state of comfort and enjoyment, into a miserable existence of penury and want.” In impressing American sailors, “S” argued, the British had eliminated the gains of the Revolution for countless American families. Sailors forced into servitude while their families were forced into lives of want. Clearly, according to “S,” something needed to be done.

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163 *Essex Register* (Salem, MA), February 23, 1811; also in *The Bee* (Hudson, NY), March 8, 1811; *Carolina Gazette* (Charleston, SC) March 29, 1811.

164 *Essex Register* (Salem, MA), January 16, 1811; also in *The Farmer’s Repository* (Charlestown, WV), February 1, 1811; *The Carolina Gazette* (Charleston, SC), February 22, 1811.
Efforts to rouse public sentiment against British actions were fortified by first hand accounts of American sailors who had escaped British captivity. Joshua Davis’s narrative, which recounted his impressment in the British Navy, was published in the spring of 1811 joining the growing attacks on the British practice. In his narrative, Davis recounted his service during the Revolution aboard privateer *Jason* and his subsequent capture and impressment by British forces. While the narrative follows the standard description of his brutal treatment, escape, and eventual return home, it is the appendix and a note to his “readers and others” that directly engaged the ongoing discussion of British impressment.

Davis’s appendix described in detail the “barbarity” of the British officers and the treatment of those who failed to follow orders. Those who “prefer to be hung” are taken on deck and hung from the yard arm. The victims are “run up until [their] head touches the yard . . . and thus. . .hang for about half and hour,” before their bodies are taken down and buried in mud flats at low tide. Those who do not wished to be hanged were often “flogged through the fleet.” Those being flogged would be tied to the long boat and receive fifty lashes from the boatswain of every British ship in the area. “If you live through it, you are taken back to your ship. . .but if you die before your receive the complement, you are taken to every ship, and get every lash the Court Marshal ordered.” In one incident that Davis had witnessed a fellow sailor was court marshaled for having assaulted an officer. The man was “sentenced to receive 800 lashes. The day he was punished, after he had been flogged along side 13 ships, he was bro’t to our. The blanket was taken off his shoulders . . . and the doctor . . . found that the man was dead.” Despite his death, the punishment continued and the boatswain applied fifty lashes. “After this he
was carried to two other ships and received fifty lashes at each, and then carried to low water mark and buried in the mud.” Davis’s account underscored the charges of brutality that were being leveled in newspapers around the country on a daily basis.¹⁶⁵

Despite his rather dire description of life on board the British ships Davis counseled those who sought to “know the fate of your fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles, cousins, or sweethearts” not to lose hope. For despite the brutal conditions, the lost loved ones may have survived. “Many of them are on board those hellish floating torments, and wish to let you know where they are. They write letters often but it is ten to one whether they ever reach your hands.” These letters, according to Davis, are intercepted and handed over to British officers. Once discovered the authors of the letters are asked “what he meant by sending letters out of the ship, without an officer’s consent.” With no legitimate excuse these sailors are left to the mercy of the officer. “If the officer happens to be a Washington, he will tell the man never to do the like again, but if he should prove a Nero, the man [will be] . . . put in irons, until a time is set by the course of inquiry for the writer’s destiny and all this merely for attempting to let his friends know his unhappy situation—There are nine Neros in the British navy, to one Washington.” Davis’s message of hope is tempered by the notion that those Americans who survived were under the command of “Neros” who might force them into chains or any of the other brutal punishments Davis had described.¹⁶⁶

Citing the many violations of American rights at sea, many Republicans pushed for the United States to declare war on England. Yet many Federalists refused to join the march to war, questioning the case put forth by the War Hawks. Federalists challenged

¹⁶⁵ Joshua Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, An American Citizen, who was pressed and served on board six ships of the British Navy (Baltimore: B. Edes, Printer, 1811), 63-72.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 72-74.
Republican credibility calling on President Madison to justify the march to war, “If there are any good causes of war in the possession of our administration, and they intend to have the united aid of the county in supporting the war, they must come out with them.” Responding to the evidence which had been presented, a few Federalists denied the veracity of accounts of the impressment of American sailors aboard British ships arguing that “the complaints on this subject were impudent falsehoods, fabricated for party purposes.” The majority of Federalists were willing to acknowledge that American sailors were suffering aboard British ships, however, they argued that it was the Madison administration, rather than the British Navy, who bore direct responsibility for the troubling state of affairs. Federalist critics argued that Madison had incited the British to action as a consequence of his actions “favoring and befriending the eternal enemy of England.” In allowing French ships into American ports, the opponents of the war argued, “we have certainly abandoned all appearance of a disposition to act as neutrals, and these impressments may be the first fruits of this anti-neutral conduct.” Additionally, they contended that the impressment of American sailors was accidental as British authorities sought out English deserters. The impressment of American sailors, then, was the result of an “evil that necessarily grows out of the resemblance that the English and Americans bear to each other in complexion, features, language, and character.—But under a treaty, the evil would find a regular remedy.” Faced with these challenges, “the British made various successive efforts to adjust the difficulties which existed, but which by some fatality on our part always fell to the ground.”

167 Commercial Advertiser (New York), September 6, 1811; also in Connecticut Journal (New Haven), September 26, 1811. American Mercury (Hartford, CT), January 3, 1811. Columbian Sentinel (New York), May 8, 1811; also in New Bedford Mercury (MA), May 10, 1811; The Portland Gazette (ME), May 141
As early as 1806, under the Monroe-Pinkney treaty, Jefferson had had an opportunity to negotiate a settlement to the on-going trade difficulties between England and the United States. Jefferson and his supporters, however, feared that the treaty would lead to a neo-colonial existence, echoing many of the criticism of the earlier Jay Treaty. Fearful of potential Federalist maneuvering in Congress, Jefferson refrained from ever submitting the treaty for approval. Federalists were unwilling to let go of what they perceived of as a lost opportunity, “had Monroe’s treaty been ratified impressments would have ceased. For by an understanding accompanying that treaty, the British agreed to relinquish the practice of impressing seamen from on board our ships—even their own sailors.” In an effort to underscore their point, Federalists claimed that when news of the impressment of an American citizen reached British officials all haste was made to secure the release of American seamen. According to the Federalists, American seamen continued to suffer at the hands of the British because the American government that was “not merely ineffectual but ridiculous. . . . It can indeed issue a proclamation and thus make known its own pitiful imbecility. . .and it can cry aloud against British outrage and caution the people not to vote for federalists; all that it can do, because it has often done it, but what can it do more?—Nothing.”

13, 1811. Trenton Federalist (NJ), May 13, 1811. Commercial Advertiser (New York), September 6, 1811; also in Connecticut Journal (New Haven), September 26, 1811. 168 The Washingtonian (Windsor, VT), May 27, 1811. Contrary to Federalist claims, the Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806 would likely not have ended British impressment of American sailors. The Balance (Hudson, NY), May 7, 1811; also in The Washingtonian (Windsor, VT), May 27, 1811. For the Federalist defense of British efforts see Portland Gazette (ME), May 13, 1811; New Bedford Mercury (MA), May 10, 1811 and May 31, 1811, and Trenton Federalist (NJ), May 13, 1811. For more on the Monroe-Pinkney Treaty see Anthony Steel, “Impressment in the Monroe-Pinkney Negotiations, 1806-1807,” The American Historical Review, (January 1952), 352-369 and Donald Hickey, “The Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806: A Reappraisal,” The William and Mary Quarterly (January, 1987) 65-88. Hickey argues that while the treaty did not bring an end to all impressment, the treaty itself was favorable to the United States and would have greatly limited the practice of impressment. Contemporary Federalists, however, were quick to overstate the lost opportunity and made more sweeping claims for the terms of the treaty.
In addition accusing the Republicans of overstating British actions and citing the failure of the Madison administration to negotiate with the English, the Federalists charged that Republicans were guilty of overlooking French violations of American rights, and worse yet, had failed to fully recognize the danger posed by France. The *Portland Gazette* noted that the same people who were “harping on the subject of British aggression” were at the same time “justifying every act of the French government, and rejoicing at the usurpations and plundering acts of Bonaparte.” Such abuse, they argued, would have long ago resulted in war if it had been committed by the English. “But party feelings cannot be excited by railing at French aggressions, as they can be by preaching about British impressments.” The French violations of American rights were far greater, according to the Federalists than anything the English had done. “It is useless to multiply the instances in which [American sailors] are treated by the French worse than the Algerines treat the captives who they reduce to slavery. Federalists take no pleasure in sickening the public mind by recitals of unavenged disgrace which the executive calmly pockets,” however, they felt obliged to highlight an incident in which French officers condemned and shot three American seamen “merely for being present though without taking a part in the recapture of their vessel by their messmates.” This assault on American liberty had been “suffered to pass with scarcely any extraordinary notice,” if the British had behaved in the same fashion, “all Washington would have been in a bustle. . . . The Tammany societies from one extremity of the continent to the other would have lifted up their hatchets and howled the most dismal yells for war; and poor Madison would have burst with impotent wrath.” In ignoring the repeated French assaults on American liberty and preparing for war against England, the United States seemed
perilously close to ruin and incorporation into the French empire. “The country is fast asleep. Would to God it may not be the sleep of death! . . . . We think we see our country to be already within the precincts of the French empire.”

Republicans countered the Federalist attacks, labeling Federalists as “the eternal apologists of Great Britain,” who sought to conceal the fact “that thousands of American seamen are now held in bondage aboard the British navy.” In concealing the true nature of the British attacks, the Republicans charged, the Federalists were in effect defending “the murder or our citizens—the impressment and captivity of freeborn Americans—the capture and confiscation of American property.” Writing as “AMERICANUS,” one Republican charged that “to read a federal newspaper, a stranger might imagine that government had recently laid some odious tax upon the people. . . . Indeed scarcely any one would suspect that the persons who raised such a hedious outcry had anything to eat or drink or wear.” Yet, according to AMERICANUS, the Federalists who had raised the loudest cry against the Madison administration were better off than almost any other citizens in the entire world. These are men “who eat roast beef, plumb-puddings, fowls, and fish three or four times a day; who regale themselves with tea, coffee, cream butter, the finest bread, the choicest wines; whose vestments are silks and satins, the best linens and woolens, and the rarest of cloths; who in brief, enjoy all the comforts and all the delicacies of life in the greatest profusion.” With so much, AMERICANUS asked, what is it “that those noisy men want? Is it war? No! (they tell us) not that. Is it an embargo? O no! by no means! say they. Non-intercourse or non-importation? Not at all. What, then, is it submission to the wrongs which Great Britain has inflicted on our lawful

169 Portland Gazette (ME), January 7, 1811. Northern Whig (Hudson, NY), May 31, 1811; also in Portsmouth Oracle (NH), June 8, 1811. Connecticut Courant (Hartford), July 17, 1811; also in The Alexandria Gazette (VA), August 12, 1811.
trade? No! they cry as if indignant. Thus it is they clamor for everything; but press them to particulars and they want nothing.” Republicans responded to the Federalist attacks by labeling those who opposed the Madison administration as, as best, spoiled whiners, and, at worst, outright traitors. 170

Republicans also worked to defend the Madison administration arguing that while the Federalists “have continually branded our rulers with the imputation of French influence,” they “cannot produce a single evidence of the accusation.” Instead, Republicans argued, Madison had worked tirelessly for the entire nation. The embargoes and non-intercourse acts had been enacted “to save from the grasp of the belligerent powers the property of our merchants.” The Madison administration, according to Republicans, “has invariably stood up for the merchants, and the merchants have invariably deserted the government.” If they were unwilling to accept the help of the government, “let the brawlers at Boston and elsewhere manifest as much zeal against the wrongs of the English . . . as they do against the measures of their own.” The Republicans argued that while the Federalists attacked Madison from their position of comfort and failed to come up with a plan of their own, “the American government will never lose sigh of this business, till our seamen are released.” 171

Reality, however, did not bear out the Republican claim, even as the War Hawks in Congress continued to build their case for war, British officials continued to soften in their stance toward the United States. Two days before the declaration of war, the British foreign secretary rescinded the Orders in Council and shortly thereafter nearly all British

170 American Mercury (Hartford, CT), January 3, 1811. New Hampshire Patriot (Concord), February 19, 1811. National Intelligencer (Washington, DC), May 25, 1811; also in American Watchman (Wilmington, DE), May 29, 1811; Farmer’s Repository (Charlestown, WV), May 31, 1811.
limitations on American shipping were removed. Despite British efforts, the United States declared war on England on 18 June 1811.\(^{172}\)

In the build up to war, many Federalists came to believe that Republicans saw war as an opportunity to silence the Federalist opposition as much as a necessary step to defend American rights against British assault. Republican actions following the declaration of war suggests such fears were justified. In the months following the declaration of war those who spoke out against the conflict found themselves under attack. Baltimore’s *Federal Republican* was the first target of Republican animus. In the lead up to the war rumors had circulated throughout Baltimore that the Federalist paper would be forcefully shut down if its anti-war stance was not moderated. Despite the threats, the *Federal Republican* refused to yield, noting that if it did so, “a war would put the constitution and civil rights to sleep. Those who commenced it, would become dictators and despots, and the people their slaves.” In June of 1812, the *Federal Republican* decried the war as folly, “WAR AT HAND—As prelude to their approaching fall, God in his mercy has deprived our rulers of their senses.” The paper published a series of critiques, noting on numerous occasions not only the unjust nature of the conflict, but the lack of preparation on the part of the federal government to fight a war. Baltimore Republicans were quick to make good on their threats of violence. On 22 June 1812, the *Federal Republican* printing office was destroyed by a mob headed up by a French apothecary named Philip Lewis.\(^{173}\)

\(^{172}\) Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 41-44.

\(^{173}\) *Federal Republican* (Washington, DC), June 1, 1812. Cited in *The Franklin Herald* (Greenfield, MA), June 23, 1812. The *Federal Republican* critiques of the war were reprinted throughout the country in papers including the *Alexandria Gazette* (VA), June 20, 1812; *The New-York Spectator* (NY), June 20, 1812; *New York Herald* (NY), June 20, 1812; *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), June 22, 1812; *The Franklin Herald* (Greenfield, MA), June 23, 1812. For specifics of this incident see
This attack, while certainly a violation of the law, was part of an established extra-legal tradition in British and American history. “Demolishing or ‘pulling down’ buildings was a widespread practice of both English and American mobs in the eighteenth century, while the destruction of the printing press was an activity reminiscent of several American Revolutionary mobs.” Following the destruction of the Federal Republican, once the “laws of nature and reason” had been satisfied, local officials intervened and brought an end to the violence reestablishing the “laws of the land.” The attack and official response comported with the established tradition of British and American extra-legal activity, however, even after the destruction of the Federalist newspaper, mob violence continued in Baltimore. Despite the ongoing threat, the publishers of the Federal Republican decided to reestablish distribution of their paper from a Baltimore address. “Asserting that the ‘empire of laws’ had been ‘overthrown’ and that society had become ‘unhinged’ and ‘degraded to a state of nature,’ Hanson planned to do what he felt Mayor Johnson and the other city officials were failing to do—guarantee the freedom of the press.” Along with fifty other Federalist volunteers, the editor of the Federal Republican returned to Baltimore and began to distribute their paper. “Being well armed and committed to stand their ground the Federalists were confident that the cowardly mob would not dare risk a prolonged attack.” The Federalist prediction, however, was proven wrong and on the night of 27 June 1812, the Baltimore headquarters of the Federal Republican again fell under attack. The ensuing conflict ended only when the besieged Federalists surrendered to town officials after having shot

and killed Thadeus Gale, a member of the mob, on the promise that authorities would protect the Federalists’ persons and property.\textsuperscript{174}

The promised protection failed to materialize. The mob destroyed the new home of the \textit{Federal Republican} and “in marked contrast to the workmanlike demolition of the \textit{Federal Republican} office in June, this activity was carried on in an unorganized fashion by looters and scavengers who grabbed what they could, down to the bricks and lumber.” The Federalists themselves suffered a similar fate, despite the efforts of Baltimore Mayor Edward Johnson to protect the prisoners, when the mob reassembled at the Baltimore jail attacked them:

They attacked the sanctuary of the prisoners. . .there a scene of horror and murder ensued, which for its barbarity has no parallel in the history of the American people, and no equal but the in the massacres of Paris. . . . Seven or eight of the gentlemen were thrown in a heap, under an impression, entertained by these assassins, that they were dead. Some effected their escape by stratagem, or by interposition of some protecting friend. One was detained as a subject for the trial of every refinement of torture which their fiend-like invention suggested. . . . On the ensuing day a general terror prevailed throughout the city.

The attacks struck fear into the hearts of Federalists around the nation. Newspapers around the country reprinted accounts of the attack, denouncing the violence. One paper labeled the actions in Baltimore “almost equal in enormity to the barbarities exercised by the French blood drinkers.” Another noted that the Baltimore mob acted with the “charasteristick cruelty and wickedness of Frenchmen.” Of the Federalists in Baltimore, many left town, while those who stayed remained silent. “We were fearful of muttering our sentiments,” remembered one Baltimore Federalist, “lest we in turn might be attacked.” Following the attacks in Baltimore, Republican mobs in Georgia and

Pennsylvania attacked the Savannah *American Patriot* and the Norristown *Herald* destroying both papers. Other Federalist newspapers around the country received warnings to either change their tone on the war or face attack. The *Connecticut Courant* saw these attacks revealing the Republicans true intentions for going to war. “We now see, written in bloody characters, by what means disaffection must cease. The war, pretendedly for the freedom of the seas, is valiantly wages against the freedom of the press.” To the Federalists, the Baltimore riots and the attacks that followed represented a real threat to the United States. The attacks on Federalist newspapers were not simply an attack Federalist opposition, they were an attack on the basic freedoms of all Americans. The mobs in Baltimore were not the extra-legal mobs of Anglo-American tradition, but rather were the mobs of the French Revolution. Following the Baltimore Riots, Federalist opposition to the war took on a new dimension, Federalists were no longer simply protesting what they believed to be an unjust war, so too, now, were they defending American liberties.\(^{175}\)

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The years leading up to the War of 1812 were marked by a national debate centered on the plight of American sailors pressed into service aboard British ships. While Federalist dissenters challenged the War Hawks version of events, they did not deny that the liberty of American sailors was threatened. Once war had begun, however, the national debate began to shift. The Baltimore mobs, and those that followed in other

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cities, appeared to the Federalists to be more like those of the French rather than the American Revolution. Federalists believed that their rights were being trampled by the unchecked mob and they began to fear that the United States was being led astray and that the values of the American Revolution were being corrupted. Federalist opposition, which had continued to simmer throughout 1812, returned to full force in the winter of 1813, when Congress authorized James Madison to pursue a policy of “retaliation” in the treatment of American prisoners. The policy declared that “the President of the United States is hereby authorized to cause full and ample retaliation to be done and executed on such British subjects, soldiers, seamen or marines or Indians, in alliance or connection with Great Britain, being prisoners of war.” Republicans offered their full support of the policy, with many believing that such a policy would be the “Aegis—which shall protect all who fight under our banners.” Federalists, on the other hand, saw this measure as another horrifying sign that the United State was abandoning its founding principles and heading down the path to tyranny. One Federalist newspaper labeled Madison the “Emperour of America,” and argued that the policy of retaliation would be most felt by American prisoners in the hands of the British. ¹⁷⁶

The policy of “retaliation” was formulated following the Battle of Queenston Heights. In early October 1812, Major General Stephen Van Rensselaer led an American force of more than 6,000 troops to the bank of the Niagara River in upstate New York across from Queenston Heights, Ontario. Outnumbering the Canadian forces three to one, American forces were able to overrun the British outpost and score a quick victory. Despite the promising start to the conflict, members of the New York militia refused to

¹⁷⁶ Connecticut Herald (New Haven), March 30, 1813. New York Shamrock (NY), March 20, 1813. Rhode Island American (Providence), October 15, 1813; The Repertory (Boston, MA), December 21, 1813.
cross the river and reinforce the Heights, arguing, that as state militia, they were not required to cross into Canada. Without reinforcements, the American troops at Queenston Heights were soon defeated when Canadian forces launched a counteroffensive. The failed American raid left 950 men, including twenty-three naturalized Americans who had been born in the British Isles, in British hands.

The fate of these twenty-three naturalized citizens sparked a national debate when they were transported to England to stand trial for treason. Royal officials argued that despite these soldiers’ claim of American citizenship, they had been born in the United Kingdom and were therefore to be treated as traitors to the crown. When news of the British actions reached Washington, President Madison and Congressional Republicans responded by authorizing a policy of retaliation.

Republicans celebrated the new policy while simultaneously taking the opportunity to decry British brutality. Writing from New York “Tit for Tat” noted that “the necessity of retaliation is ever to be regretted, and its practice to be avoided, if not absolutely necessary for the purposes of self-preservation. Retaliation, it must however be observed, is often beneficial: it prevents war, it mitigates war, it shortens war.” “Tit for Tat” went as far as to argue that if a policy of retaliation had been put in place during the years leading up to the war, the war itself might have been avoided. Anticipating opposition to the policy, “Tit for Tat” argued that “an ill-timed humanity . . . tends to embolden the enemy. Retaliation of every cruelty will render the instances of cruelty fewer.” Other supporters of retaliation argued that American soldiers were being held captive by “British savages, by men who have no sense of honor & who are callous to the feelings of humanity.” Given the inhumanity of the British captors, a policy of retaliation
seemed to be the only course of action. “Hostages (naval commanders if possible) ought to be detained in close confinement. . . . Painful as retaliation is, it is a duty, and nothing else will teach Englishmen to treat their prisoners according to the usage of civilized nations.” The *Baltimore American* hoped that the American government would make full use of the policy:

> We trust that the government will rigidly pursue this system until the British officers and government may become sensible of the policy, if they are insensible to the benevolence of treating the American prisoners as human beings and equals. A similar proceeding for the future security of our seamen, who may fall into the enemy’s hands, is loudly called for by justice and the public voice.

To the Republicans, retaliation was a necessary tool to be employed to counterbalance British cruelty and to bring an end to the war. Such action they argued was both just and popular. Beyond citing contemporary British cruelties and the demands of the “public voice,” some Republicans cited historical precedent. 177

The *Essex Register* declared that “this mode of retaliating upon the enemy has produced good effects on former occasions, and we trust that a speedy release of our unfortunate countrymen so cruelly and unjustly confined by the enemy, will be the immediate result of this spirited measure of our Government.” Other supporters of retaliation noted that “our government is called upon to act with resolution,” to move forward with “an unyielding determination to retaliate! Such a system had the happiest effects during the revolutionary war.” In Vermont, the *Green-Mountain Farmer* recalled that “in the time of our revolutionary struggle, the inflexibility of Washington obtained its object.” Following Washington’s lead, “the right of dealing a righteous retaliation has

177 *Military Monitor* (New York), April 19, 1813. *Essex Gazette* (Salem, MA), June 5, 1813. Reprinted in *The Albany Argus* (NY), June 18, 1813; *New York Statesman* (Albany) June 23, 1813; *The Essex Register* (Salem, MA), June 26, 1813; *Ohio Register* (Clinton, OH), June 26, 1813; and *The Otsego Herald* (Cooperstown, NY), July 3, 1813.
been vested in some measure with the President” and “in the present contest our
government are exhibiting the inflexibility of Washington.” The results of this behavior
was that an “approving Heaven has smiled propitiously, and hitherto granted the same
success.” Finally, the Newark Centinal reported that:

In the revolutionary war general WASHINGTON adopted the principles of retaliation. When
gen. Lee was taken a prisoner and confined as a “deserter from their service,” lieut. Col.
Campbell, with five Hessian field officers, were selected and detained. And when capt. Huddy
was hung by the tories in Monmouth county, Washington resolved on retaliation for this
“deliberate murder,” and “capt. Argile was designated by lot for this purpose.” These spirited
retaliations of the American nation had a salutary effect then;--we believe they will have the same
happy effect now!

Citing British cruelty and historical precedent, Republicans argued that the policy of
retaliation was a necessary and justified course of action.178

Congress itself formed a special committee to report on “the spirit and manner in
which war has been waged by the enemy.” In a series of hearings, the committee
“collected and arranged all the testimony on this subject that could at this time be
procured.” The testimony provided Congress with a litany of charges against the British,
including the “Bad treatment of American prisoners” and the “Massacre and burning of
American prisoners surrendered to officers of Great Britain by Indians in the British
service.” Based on this testimony, the committee concluded that “the British government
has adopted a rigor of regulation,” that showed “instances of a departure from the
customary rules of war by the selection and confinement in close prisons of particular
persons.” Sections of the committee’s findings were reported in newspapers around the

178 Essex Register (Salem, MA), October 9, 1813; reprinted in The Alexandria Gazette (VA), October 21,
1813; Farmer’s Repository (Charlestown, WV), October 21, 1813; The Rhode Island Republican
(Newport, RI), October 21, 1813; True American (Bedford, PA), October 27, 1813. City Gazette
(Charleston, SC), November 23, 1813; Carolina Gazette (Charleston, SC), November 27 1813. Green-
Mountain Farmer (Bennington, VT), May 25, 1813. Reprinted in the American Watchman (Wilmington,
DE), December 15, 1813.
country and while a complete copy of the hearings were published in 1813. The full report went through two more printings by 1814. 179

Republicans made their case for retaliation on both official and popular channels. The reports of British “barbarities” and citation of historical precedent offered justification for a policy that most agreed was a regrettable course of action. The Republican arguments in support of the measure did little to reassure Federalists. Following the mob violence in Baltimore, many Federalists feared the authorization of a policy of retaliation was another step toward the complete destruction of American values and the emergence of tyranny in the United States, with Madison emerging as an American Napoleon.

The core of the Federalists argument was that Madison had no right to retaliate against England for seizing twenty-three of its own citizens. They saw Madison’s efforts to interfere with the British right to try these soldiers were a violation of international law. According to one Federalist, “the case is very simple. The British have taken 23 of their own subjects, fighting in the enemy ranks against their own country; and as this is a crime punishable with death by the laws of all civilized nations, these men have been sent home to be tried for the fact.” Madison’s response to this simple case was seen by many Federalists, as well as by those in England, as a fundamental misinterpretation of international law. The London Courier asked “who is Mr. MADISON, and WHAT IS AMERICA, that the public law of Europe should be changed at their fiat and for their convenience? By the chicanery of American naturalization the United States have

179 United States House of Representatives, Barbarities of the Enemy: Report of the Committee . . . as Relates to the Spirit and Manner in which the War Has Been Waged by the Enemy (Washington: A & G Way Printers, 1813). Baltimore Patriot (MD), August 13, 1813; New York Spectator (NY), August 18, 1813; Rhode Island Republican (Newport), August 19, 1813; Charleston City Gazette (SC), August 20, 1813; American Mercury (Hartford, CT), August 24, 1813; The Boston Yankee (MA), August 20, 1813.
endeavored to destroy at once the principle of natural law which has been recognized and acted upon in every other state.” Citing Blackstone, the Courier argued “It is a principle of universal law . . . that the natural born subject of one prince, cannot, by any act of his own, no, not by swearing allegiance to another, put off, or discharge his natural allegiance to the former.”

To many it seemed that Madison had seized on the issue of the twenty-three naturalized citizens to expand the power of the presidency. A number of Federalists saw Madison’s policy of retaliation as yet another step in the United States march toward tyranny. The Rhode Island American charged that Madison was acting “in imitation of the French Emperor,” while in Boston, The Repertory labeled Madison “the Emperor of America.” Madison’s attempt to free the twenty-three soldiers, according to the Federalists, put the entire United States in danger. “The prisoners in possession of the enemy, if the facts alleged be true, are traitors, and have forfeited their lives by laws of nations. If Mr. Madison proceeds in the course he has taken, he will find the whole civilized world united against him, with the solitary exception of even Bonaparte himself.”

In an essay printed in the Boston Repertory, the Federalists charged that Madison tried to make the world believe two things, and Bonaparte flatly contradicts him in both.” The first of Madison’s claims contended “that it is inconsistent in G. Britain to naturalize the subjects of other countries, and yet to forbid their own subjects from bearing arms against her when naturalized abroad. Bonaparte says there is nothing at all inconsistent

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180 Evening Post (New York), November 22, 1813. Reprinted in City Gazette (Charleston, SC), October 16, 1813.
181 Rhode Island American (Providence), October 15, 1813; Repertory (Boston, MA), December 21, 1813. Evening Post (New York), November 22, 1813; also in Connecticut Journal (New Haven, CT), November 29, 1813 and the Northern Whig (Hudson, NY), November 30, 1813.
in this. The grant of naturalization is confined to privileges within your own territory only.” Madison’s second claim charged that Britain “claims to hang all Englishmen found in arms against her. Bonaparte says, crime or no crime, it is what I will do to every scoundrel Frenchman whom I shall so take, let him be naturalized or not.” The Repertory went on to cite French law which stated that “Frenchmen naturalized abroad EVEN with our permission, can at no time carry arms against France under pain of being indicted in our courts and condemned to . . . death.” Madison, the Federalists charged, had violated international law, laws under which even Napoleon operated. In moving outside of the law of nations, “Mr. Madison’s new and cruel principle of retaliation . . . is to be the means of laying our cities to ashes.”

The Boston Daily Advertiser charged “nothing can exceed the horror and barbarity of the system of retaliation now going on. In the nineteenth century, to find men adding willfully to all the complicated, unavoidable horrors of war, a system of refined cruelty which would have disgraced the most barbarous nation, is, indeed lamentable.” Madison, in pursuing the policy of “retaliation without cause, is responsible for all the sufferings, all the bloodshed, all the desolated cities and other calamities which may ensue.” There can be no debate about the twenty-three soldiers on trial in London, the Boston Daily Advertiser argued. “Allegiance is perpetual” as evidenced by the case of Mr. D, “a merchant of London” who “was duly naturalized, was a free holder and voter in Boston,” and “went back to his native country and without any new act, became a freeholder and burgess or freeman of London.” Such evidence to seemed to suggest “very logical[ly] and very clear[ly] we are aggressors, or rather Mr. Madison is, and must be responsible both to his country, and to God for all the blood which may be shed and

182 Repertory (Boston, MA), December 21, 1813.
all the misery which may be produced by this system.” In Providence, the Rhode Island Gazette, claimed that “it is evidently the intention of Mr. Madison to make the war popular by sacrificing the lives of our fellow citizens.” In response to the policy of retaliation, “the British threaten to retaliate in extenso, by hanging two for one.” Madison planned “to save the lives of traitors . . . Mr. M is to sacrifice the lives of honest native born Americans. His motives are evident. We say that these things are done for no other purpose than to widen the breach between the two countries—But we hope the people will turn their indignation upon those who are endeavoring to entail on them the miseries of a protracted war.” Federalists feared that the policy of retaliation was little more than a political ploy on the part of Madison to prop up and expand the war against England.  

The legitimacy of the American policy of retaliation aside, many Federalists feared that there would be a terrible price to pay for such a policy. Specifically, they feared American prisoners would bear the brunt of retaliation at the hands of the British. The New York Evening Post argued that Madison himself, claimed that the policy of retaliation “would be to return a specific injury, equivalent to the injury received.” If equal treatment was the president’s aim, the Post argued, “clearly then, what he could do in this case, and all he could do, would be to seize an equal number of American prisoners, who had been fighting in the enemy’s ranks within the U. States, and who had been naturalized and become English adopted citizens.” Instead, to “retaliate for this, the president has seized upon an equal number of men, against whom nothing can be alleged from any quarter.” In acting in such a manner, the Post argued, Madison was placing the “crimes of the guilty on the heads of the innocent, and he shall press and

183 Boston Daily Advertiser (MA), December 16, 1813. Rhode Island American (Providence), November 19, 1813.
execute the prisoners he has seized.” Madison’s conduct can be seen as “nothing short of MURDER.”

Such behavior the Federalists feared opened the way to mass cruelty on both sides of the conflict. The *Boston Gazette* charged that “This system, once begun, there will be no end to it. Great Britain has taken many more prisoners than we have—If we hang and shoot, they will hang and shoot.” As a result of the policy of retaliation, “the natives of this country are . . . to be butchered like cattle, merely for the sake of protecting British and Irish traitors.” The *Federal Republican*, publishing from Georgetown, continued to voice its opposition, stating that the policy of retaliation will result in a “progressive series of Barbarities,” in which, “there will be but a momentary interval before the ordinary treatment of prisoners must be exchanged, as respects all, for the modes in which they are enslaved, immured, and deprived of life by nations over whom civilization has not dawned.” These cruelties would be applied, according to the *Federal Republican* “to the whole number of prisoners in [British] possession, 1500, said to be.”

In addition to their threat to retaliate against all American prisoners, the *Federal Republican* reported, the British also threatened the “destruction to all our exposed cities, towns, and villages,” if the policy of retaliation continued. “We are now threatened with the destroying vengeance of [British] fleets, if our government persists in the course of retaliation.”

A letter in the *Boston Spectator* argued that Madison had placed the United States and Great Britain on a course to “exhibit a novel specimen of ferocity in their warfare” and that if “principles, held sacred for more than 300 years, are to be violated—if two

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184 New York Evening Post (NY), December 30, 1813.
nations, descended from common ancestors, breathing the same spirit of freedom, and professing the same religion are to be forces into a contest of unmeasured cruelty, there are men in this country who will deserve, and receive from the moderate, humane, and intelligent of both nations, a full share of censure, if not execration.” According to the *Boston Spectator*, Madison’s policy had destroyed centuries of principles, all for the sake of British traitors.  

The *Salem Gazette* offered direct evidence of the British perspective on the retaliation law republishing a column from the “London Sun, a ministerial paper generally distinguished for its moderation. The *Sun* reported that the American Congress had vested in “JAMES MADISON, a power to torture or murder British prisoners of war! Our indignation is so great, that we can scarcely find terms to reprobate this unparalleled instance of daring effrontery and atrocious injustice.” England would not stand for such actions, the *Sun* argued and England, “proud of her rank among nations, vigorous, high in character, and clothed in strength” would not stand for such behavior. The American policy, the *Sun* charged, was more “desperately wicked” than any “entertained by any legal government in a civilized country. Under the authority thus granted, there is no cruelty that may not be committed, and when committed, justified.” This legislation made Madison little different than “BONAPARTE,” leaving “the lives of British subjects at his mercy, with no security but the caprice of the hostile head of a hostile faction.”

The policy of retaliation was utterly without civilized precedent. “No law of nations—no principle consistent either with the original and indefeasible rights of man, or with the modified privileges which result from the social compact can sanction or even palliate

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186 *Boston Spectator* (MA), January 8, 1814.
them.” If the Americans were to pursue the policy of retaliation, the *Sun* warned there would be dire consequences:

> Be it at the peril of America if she dare for this to touch a hair of a British head—Her rulers have provoked and sought the combat, and she must submit to the evils they have thus brought upon her people. But if an Englishman is made to suffer one pain or penalty in consequence of this Act, we would raise our voice (if possible in thunder) to denounce the Government which did not instantly take tenfold vengeance in retaliating upon the guilty—for to hesitate a moment would be barbarity and not mercy.

The *London Sun’s* vociferous denouncement of American retaliation and the threatened British response suggested Federalist concern for American captives in British hands seemed warranted.¹⁸⁷

Another Federalist challenged the sincerity of Republicans concern for American sailors. Writing in New York’s *Evening Post*, this Federalist turned the calls for an end to impressment back upon the Republicans who supported the policy of retaliation. If Republican “whining was anything but the grossest affectation, it would not be thus confined to the case of impressment; it would extend itself to the cases of real American prisoners in close confinement; cases, equally entitled to commiseration, at least.” If Republican compassion for the plight of American citizens was real, the author argued, “these men would fill the ears of government with just reproaches for most inhumanly neglecting to provide relief for American prisoners in confinement, by sending off all the English prisoners in their possession in exchange.” The brutal treatment of Americans could be prevented, according to this author, if only Republicans cared enough to do something.¹⁸⁸

One of the most effective techniques in drawing attention to the danger of retaliation was employing the letters of American prisoners themselves. The letters of

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¹⁸⁷ *Salem Gazette* (MA), July 27, 1813.
¹⁸⁸ *Evening Post* (New York), December 10, 1813.
two Americans held in Quebec were a key component of the Federalist critique of retaliation. The first letter, dated 17 November 1813, decried the “inhuman operation of the unchristian principle of RETALIATION.” The author was quick to note that he was “now in close confinement.” As an American, the author of the letter stated, he would “willingly yield of his life” to the service of his country,” however, he felt the “deepest mortification and pain, mingled with the most poignant indignation,” that he would lose his life for “transient” and “disaffected” foreigners. He argued that his unnecessary confined and potential execution marked “the beginning of the approaching catastrophe, by which the proud American will be disgraced.”

Another prisoner in Quebec reported that he, also, was “now in close confinement in the Gaol of this City, as an hostage for some renegade Irishmen and Englishmen, deserters from the British army, and traitors to their country . . . for such villains I am now suffering the hardships and horrors of a Gaol, shut out from every comfort and blessing of society.” The prisoner’s only hope for his safe return was “if the question of retaliation be decided without further acts of violence . . . but if it is carried to the extremity of ferocity, I have no hopes ever to see my country or friends again--Remember sweet little Mercia [His only child].” In an editorial commentary at the end of the letter MILITADES remarked “if there is any true-born American that can read this letter and not sincerely sympathize with the writer and his country, in the situation in which we are brought, of have real Americans imprisoned and exposed to be executed for British deserters, renegades, and traitors, I cannot but believe he has lost his country’s honor in foreign partialities.” In employing letters from the captives themselves, the

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189 *Evening Post* (New York), December 21, 1813; also in the *New York Herald* (NY), December 22, 1813; *Connecticut Herald* (New Haven), December 28, 1813; *Alexandria Gazette* (VA), January 1, 1814.
Federalists used one of the most powerful tools available to them. This approach drew on a long standing American tradition that stretched as far back as the captivity narratives of early New England. Letters from American prisoners suffering as a result of the policy of retaliation put a human face on the debate that no appeal to history or policy could.

In both the House and the Senate, Federalists attempted to limit Madison’s power of retaliation. In December of 1813 the Federalist minority proposed legislation that would require the President to lay before the Congress “all the evidence in his possession relative to the commencement, progress, and present state of the system of retaliation upon the prisoners of war to which the governments of the U. States and G. Britain have lately resorted.” In support of this legislation Representative John Lovett of New York observed that “it is a fact, as notorious as lamentable, that the government of the United States has entered upon a broad system of retaliation upon prisoners of war—that rapid strides in that system have already been made towards a very serious, and possibly, fatal result.” As a result of this policy, “many individuals are already deprived of their personal liberty, and in strong solicitude, are awaiting an uncertain fate. In every point of view, the subject of retaliation is important.” Such an important issue, Lovett argued, could not be left to the president alone. “It is the solemn duty of the house to examine with profound attention the ground we are advancing upon. . . . The voice of the nation and humanity,” called on Congress to “thoroughly investigate the business.” Lovett and

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190 New York Evening Post (NY), December 21, 1813; also in the Boston Gazette (MA), December 23, 1813; Portland Gazette (ME), December 27, 1813; Federal Republican (Washington DC), December 27, 1813; Alexandria Gazette (VA), January 11, 1814.
the other Federalist members of Congress saw themselves as one of the last bulwarks of American liberty and principles.\textsuperscript{191}

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In December of 1813, Worcester Massachusetts became one of the focal points in the national debate over retaliation. Ten British officers who had been paroled following their capture had settled in Worcester while waiting for their exchange. These officers had established themselves in the community and made friends with the town’s many Federalists. One British officer, Charles Morris, had even attended Thanksgiving at the home of Isaiah Thomas. A month later, the British officers in Worcester became victims of Madison’s policy of retaliation. James Prince, a United States marshal, detained the ten officers under close confinement in the Worcester jail. During their initial confinement under the new policy, the imprisoned officers were held in two room, five in each, with very little furniture a small pine table and straw beds. Many of the Worcester Federalists were incensed both by the treatment of men they had befriended and by what they viewed as the Marshall’s abuse of power.\textsuperscript{192}

Running under the headline “Retaliation with a Vengeance!” the \textit{Massachusetts Spy} reported that “although no precept or instructions from the President, or any other authority, were exhibited by the Marshal . . . the unfortunate gentlemen . . . are made subjects of . . . a retaliatory measure.” Such measures employed by the Americans and the British, the \textit{Spy} lamented, suggested a “time that both nations should cease to boast of their refinement and humanity; and acknowledge that the days of Gothick barbarity have

\textsuperscript{191} New York Commercial Advertiser (NY), December 24, 1813; see also \textit{The Journal of the House of Representatives} December 21 1813 and \textit{The Journal of the Senate} February 2, 1814 and March 9, 1814. \textit{The Federal Republican} (Washington DC), December 24, 1813.

returned.” The Worcester Federalists gathered in special meeting “to consider of something for the comfort of the British Officers, lately confined in gaol,” and called into question, “the right of the Marshal to make use of the gaol . . . without permission” from the town. 193

As the Federalist critique of the actions in Worcester spread Republicans were quick to challenge the news from Worcester charging that the “Worcester (Mass.) Gazette” (also published as the Massachusetts Spy) was “the most infamous publication, which we have ever seen, out of the columns of the ‘Common Sewer.’” The Baltimore Patriot charged that the editors of Federalist newspapers who had cried foul at the close confinement of British officers had forgotten “the three thousand enslaved American seamen” and “the victims of the Indians. . . . This cold-blooded toryism is too contemptible to be tolerated.” The Patriot also made special note of the “virulent abuse of the government,” which appeared in the Massachusetts Spy, “which was intended to please some eight or ten British prisoners.” The Massachusetts Federalists “talk about ‘conquest,’ ‘butcheries,’ ‘Alexander,’ ‘Caesar,’ ‘Napoleon,’ &c.” arguing that the President had no clear goal for the war. Such attacks, the Republicans argued, contained “not one word of truth.” Instead, “the President rests his reasons of the war on its original, declared objects.” In questioning the Federalists loyalty, the Patriot questioned to what “pitch of insolence have the tories risen in their strong-holds; and to what depth of infamy have their characters sunk?” The imprisonment of British officers at Worcester gave both Federalists and Republicans fodder for their partisan attacks, with

193 Massachusetts Spy or Worcester Gazette (MA), December 8, 1813; also in Rhode Island American (Providence), December 10 1813; Boston Repertory (MA), December 11, 1813; Connecticut Journal (New Haven), December 13, 1813; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), December 14, 1813; New York Evening Post (NY), December 17, 1813; Federal Republican (Washington, DC), December 24, 1813. Thomas, The Diary Of Isaiah Thomas, 208-209.
Federalists charging the Madison administration of cruelty and Republicans questioning the patriotism and loyalty of Federalist dissenters.\textsuperscript{194}

To Federalists, however, the imprisonment of the British officers was about more than wartime measures. Many in Worcester say the usurpation of the town jail as yet another effort on the part of the Madison administration to expand federal power. The \textit{Massachusetts Spy} highlighted the Republican threat to local control in an examination of the behavior of federal officials in Massachusetts and Kentucky in dealing with prisoners of war. The \textit{Spy} noted that in "the patriotic state of Kentucky," we "see with what nice and scrupulous regard to her rights, as a sovereign independent state, the national government has proceeded in imprisonment of the officers recently paroled at Frankfort. No secret order is issued to the marshal, commanding him to lock them up in the first gaol to be found, without asking permission of the sheriff." Running completely contrary to the events in Worcester, "a respectful letter is addressed by the secretary of states (under the direction of the president) to the chief magistrate of Kentucky, requesting that he would give facility to the execution of the order." Following this letter, the governor of Kentucky, "not considering his power sufficient to authorize any such appropriation," turned to the legislature requesting that that body approve "by legislative act" the request of the president to house the prisoners. The \textit{Spy} commented on these events noting "such is the comity practiced by the president, towards the great and patriotick state of Kentucky—while the paltry reprobate states of Massachusetts is treated with as much contempt, as the little republic of St. Marino, was treated by his great prototype, Napoleon, in carving out kingdoms and empires for his royal brothers, sisters, and cousins!" In contrasting the actions of the federal government in Kentucky with

\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Baltimore Patriot} (MD), December 14 and 21, 1813.
government actions in Worcester, Massachusetts Federalists again saw evidence that Madison administration was expanding its authority at the expense of individual liberties and was threatening to become an emperor in the mode of Napoleon.\textsuperscript{195}

While the initial Federalist protest had resulted in improved conditions for the British prisoners at Worcester, the future of the British officers was far from secure. The arrival of two military carriages in the second week of January raised concerns among the British officers that they were to be transported out of Worcester and away from the protection of the Federalists of Worcester. Fearing a change of locale, the British prisoners planned their escape. On the night of January 10, the British prisoners seized the Turnkey and made their escape. Isaiah Thomas remembered that in response to the prison break, “Canon were fired in the night, and bells rang an alarm. Barns, cellars and houses searched for them, but none were concealed therein. Mine among others.” Although five of the officers were recaptured that night in Barre, twenty miles north of Worcester, the others escaped to Canada.\textsuperscript{196}

James Prince, the Federal Marshal in Worcester, immediately posted a “reward of FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS to any person or persons who may apprehend, detain, and deliver over the nine British Prisoners to the Marshal of his Deputy of any District.” Prince offered an additional five hundred dollars to anyone “having knowledge of. . .treacherous conduct” which “may lead to a conviction of the traitors.” Prince believed he knew exactly who these traitors were. In a letter published in the Boston Patriot, he charged that “the unpleasantness” of the circumstances surrounding the imprisonment of the British officers in Worcester, “was increased by the rude and inflamed conduct and  

\textsuperscript{195} Massachusetts Spy (Worcester), January 5, 1814; also in the Boston Daily Advertiser (MA), January 13, 1814; Repertory (Boston, MA), January 13, 1814.  
\textsuperscript{196} Thomas, The Diary Of Isaiah Thomas, 213-216.
language of the Hon. Francis Blake, who most singularly stated himself to be the counsel for the prisoners of war.” Prince charged Blake with interfering in official business and explained that Blake “doubted the rights to confine them, outrageously abased the National Government in their bearing and openly declared ‘he was ready for rebellion when British field officers were arrested.’” Blake’s behavior was all the more outrageous, according to Prince, as he was “FORGETTING THAT OUR OWN COUNTRYMEN OF EQUAL RANK. . .WERE RUDELY AND UNFEELINGLY CONFINED WITH NOT HALF THE CONVENIENCES OR ACCOMODATIONS WHICH THESE PRISONERS WERE ABOUT TO RECEIVE.” Prince saw Blake’s actions as a strong indication that he had had a hand in the escape of the British prisoners. To Prince, and many other Republicans, the Federalists were traitors who had turned against their own nation in favor of England. 197

Prince went on to argue that the British officers were to be confined in a mode which “was the best which the very friendly feelings of the Sheriff, his Deputy, the underkeeper and the HONORABLE MR. BLAKE could suggest. The prisoners were put into Debtors’, and not Criminals apartments. Three dollars and fifty cents for each per week was applied to their use by the government which sum supplied them with every luxury the country could afford. Good feather beds, and blankets were procured for them.” In offering this description of the prison conditions at Worcester, Prince was attempting to undercut the critiques of the administration and trying to argue that the Federalist press had skewed the facts in their portrayal of conditions endured by British officers in American prisons. 198

197 Boston Patriot (MA), January 15, 1814.
198 Ibid.
Francis Blake was quick to respond to Prince’s charges. In a letter addressed “to the public,” Blake stated that the “false and slanderous communication from the Marshal of this District published in the ‘Boston Patriot’. . .imperiously demands from me a reply.” In recounting the events that transpired when Prince arrived with the captured British officers, Blake stated that he “civilly requested the Marshal (having then no cause of irritation against him) that he would be kind enough to communicate the authority by which the British officers were to be closely confined.” According to Blake, it was Prince who took an uncivil tone and “rudely and petulantly answered that the officers were prisoners of war, that he was representing the President of the United States and that he should exhibit no evidence of his authority, either to the prisoners or their friends.” As for Prince’s accusation that Blake supported rebellion, “it can scarcely be necessary to pronounce this A BASE, MALICIOUS, AND INFAMOUS FALSEHOOD!” Blake suggested that anyone who might be swayed to believe Prince because of the status of his office only need ask any of the other “respectable gentlemen who were present during our whole conversation,” and they would verify that he had never uttered such sentiments. 

Blake went on to challenge “the vile and infamous libel upon some of the citizens or Worcester, contained in the ‘inflated’ and ridiculous ‘PROCLAMATIONS’ of President Prince.” Blake categorized the Marshal as “a bloated pensioner upon the public sufferings, assuming the authority of the chief magistrate, and dealing out his Five Hundred Dollars to Spies and Informers, as bounty upon perjury, and encouragement to cut-throat scoundrels, to proscribe and persecute their fellow citizens.” All of this, according to Blake, was “a spectacle as hideous as was ever presented in the bloodiest

199 Ibid.
period of the French revolution.” On a personal level, Blake noted that he had “already had the horror of a domiciliary visit at midnight, and my house has been searched from the garret to the cellar, in pursuit of the prisoners I am accused of ‘secreting.’” It seemed to Blake that Prince must have been “in Paris when proscription and massacre were the daily amusements of the populace,” and that the Marshal must have been “an assiduous pupil in the school of Robespierre.” The conflicting accounts offered by Blake and Prince interwove national politics with issues of personal honor.200

Finally, refusing to concede any point to the Federal Marshall, Blake refuted Prince’s account of the conditions at the prison. On a visit to the prison, Blake found the prisoners:

suffering extremely from the dampness and impurity of the air, and the severity of the weather, it being one of the coldest nights of the present season. On examining the provisions which had been made for their lodging, we found that bags of dirty straw, with filthy and offensive rugs, had been taken from the common stock of the prison and thrown on the floor, without sheet or a blanket for their covering, and without a chair or any other furniture for their accommodation.

In addition to the poor conditions the prisoners had endured, Blake witnessed the “a boisterous and declamatory harangue,” on the part of the Marshal “about the sufferings on board the Jersey prison ship and the barbarities inflicted upon American prisoners during the present war.” These outbursts, Blake argued, were intended to convince the British prisoners that they would soon be hung in retaliation for all previous British abuse of American prisoners.201

200 Columbian Centinel (Boston, MA), January 19, 1814. The personalization of politics is more fully described in Joanne Freeman’s Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Freeman’s work only extends to the election of 1800, however, this incident bears numerous similarities to the political battles described by Freeman. While Freeman argues that personal politics was critical in a period before the establishment of political parties, this debate suggests a fusion of the personal and national politics even as the parties emerged as legitimate players at the national level.

201 Columbian Centinel (Boston, MA), January 19, 1814.
In a letter to the *Massachusetts Spy*, “THOUSANDS,” saw the dispute between Blake and Prince as symptomatic of the larger Republican effort to discredit all Federalists and paint them as traitors. Thousands argued that “it was to be expected that the escape of the British officers confined in the gaol in this town, would be made use of, to excite the suspicion and indignation of the publick against the federalists.” Despite the “false” and “unjust” nature of these charges, which “will readily be admitted to be by men of either party, who from their personal knowledge, have had the means of judging,” the scandalous charges of treason were “just what was to be expected from the unprincipled partiality of a democratick editor.” In attacking Blake, Thousands charged, Prince and his Republican supporters had “unjustly aspersed the character of thousands of other men, equally ‘friendly,’ not to the escape, but to the human treatment of prisoners of war.” In the face of Republican attacks which painted any opposition to the war as treason and toryism, Federalists continued to fear for their rights and for the legacy of the American Revolution. As the power of the federal government continued to expand, many Federalists feared the rise of tyranny.  

In the wake of the Worcester escape a letter from “HAMPDEN” appeared in the *Baltimore Patriot*. Hampden’s letter was an open address to James Madison. “SIR—I approach you with the respect which is due to the Chief Magistrate of a Republic and that frankness which becomes a faithful citizen.” Hampden applauded Madison for his conduct during course of the war and the fulfillment of his duty in applying the policy of retaliation. That being said, Hampden asked if the state of Massachusetts had a right to “interfere, and to measure and adjust the retaliation.” He argued that “in the case in question, this was done. The Marshal was abused in the exercise of his proper duties.

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202 *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester), January 19, 1814.
The Britons have escaped.” The actions of Massachusetts represented the “interference of a state authority in contravention of the authority of the United States. To a mind rich in historical information, it is needless to suggest that tolerated encroachments are the stepping stones of usurpation. It is unnecessary, likewise to add, that a spark of disaffection, blown by insolence, and fed by passion, may spread into a flame of rebellion.” With such insolence in Massachusetts, Hampden suggested that these events might “require the strong arm of government to control.” Hampden’s open letter to the President legitimized many of the Federalist fears. Although Madison had refrained from reviving the sedition law of 1798, his administration made use of the alien enemies act of 1798 which was still in effect in 1812. Although relatively lax during the first year of the conflict, throughout the course of the war these restrictions became increasingly stringent. To the Federalists, the threat of tyranny was omnipresent.203

The five officers who were recaptured in Barre on the night of their escape were transferred to the reliably Republican town of Pittsfield on January 15 and moved again to the Philadelphia Penitentiary in March. After another failed escape attempt in April of 1814, the officers were finally released when it was reported that the naturalized American soldiers were being treated as prisoners of war rather than as traitors. Officers on both sides were again dismissed on parole. Francis Blake, despite Prince’s suspicions was never officially charged with anything. Three men in Barre were arrested in early February on suspicion of having aided the escaped prisoners, but were never brought to trial following a general exchange of prisoners of war that spring.204

204 Thomas, The Diary Of Isaiah Thomas, 214-217.
While the furor over the Worcester escape eventually subsided and both the prisoners and those charged with aiding them were allowed to go free, the larger debate over federal power continued. In February the Massachusetts General Court passed an act forbidding the use of state prisons by the Federal government. In Taneytown, Maryland, Federalists gathers to celebrate “the late victories of the allied armies over Bonaparte,” toasted “the Heroes of ’76—Men who dared to be honest in the worst of times,” “the Minority in Congress,” “The Constitution of the United States—May the storms of party zeal never overleap its SACRED LIMITS,” and called for “A speedy restoration, without retaliation, of the American captives.” The debate over the policy of retaliation places the Federalists in a new light. Contrary to Richard Buel’s recent categorization of the Federalists as a subversive opposition, the Federalists, in opposing the Madison administration and working to limit retaliation, were working to protect the republican experiment rather than subvert it. Federalist opposition to retaliation centered around preserving American ideals and limiting the power of the president. Federalists sought to preserve the United States from descending into the chaos of the French Revolution, rather than to bring down the government. The violence in Baltimore had served to put the Federalists on guard against such a threat, while the policy of retaliation suggested that the Madison administration sought to expand the power of the presidency well beyond its constitutional bounds. These events were made all the more severe by the threat faced by Americans held by the British. A policy of retaliation threatened the lives of all American prisoners. Federalist actions during the course of this debate reveal a widespread effort to protect the American experiment rather than a chaotic effort to destroy the Union and bring the United States under the control of England.  

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The Hartford Convention marked the climax of Federalist opposition to the war. Convened in Hartford, Connecticut from December 15, 1814 to January 5, 1815, the New England meeting of Federalists sparked massive speculation in the press. Republican papers condemned the proceedings as a prelude to secession. “The object of the Hartford Convention” reported the Boston Chronicle, appeared to be “an independent government for New England.” If this was their goal, the Chronicle argued “they will have a ‘hard row to hoe,’” as New England Republicans would be “as much opposed to their measures, as they have been to the measures of the general government. . .but perhaps they mean to revive the reign of terror, shackle the press with another sedition law, and to gag the mouths of the republicans.” Speculating on the aims of the Hartford Convention, New England Republicans did take up same style criticism that Federalists had levied against the Madison administration raising the spectre of the French reign of terror and reviving the threat of the Federalists sponsored sedition act.\(^\text{206}\)

The Federalist press responded arguing that independence was not the aim of the Hartford Convention. “MERCATORIUS” countered the Republican charges arguing that they had “produced no evidence to support this charge” and as such these claims were “entitled to no higher degree of credit than that of a simple conjecture.” Instead, Mercatorius suggested, the aim of the Convention was likely “not to dissolve the union, or lay the foundation of a confederacy composed of the Eastern States, but, simply the

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\(^{206}\) The Boston Chronicle reprinted in The Republican Star (Easton, MD), January 3, 1815.
adoption of measures calculated to arrest the ruinous course pursued by the
administration, and to secure themselves from utter destruction . . . adhering in all they
do, or recommend to be done, to the . . . principles of our Constitution.” Federalist
newspapers throughout the country anticipated a rational, measured response from the
Convention rather than the calls for disunion predicted by the Republicans. According to
the Massachusetts Spy, the Convention met in the face “of evidence that our
administration have most cruelly abandoned and tyrannically persecuted New England;
and it has been the sole object of the Convention to restore us to our just rank and
influence in the Union.” The Essex Register charged that any notion that the Convention
would adopt any “measures which would lead to a dissolution of the Union, is now
attributed to democratic falsehood and calumny. This is ridiculous in the extreme!” It
was the “wicked democrats,” who had “created all the suspicions of treasonable
intentions of the Convention.” While there were radical Federalists who did support
independence for New England, those in the main sought reform government of the
United States, rather than independence from the Union. Despite the Federalist defense
of the Conventions’ aims, Republicans managed to portray the meetings aims as
secession. 207

Publication of the delegates’ recommendations only added fuel to the debate, with
Federalists claiming to have been vindicated and Republicans labeling the Convention as
a failed attempt as secession. The official recommendation of the Hartford Convention
called for several amendments to be made to the United States Constitution. The first
called for an end to the three-fifths clause, which delegates believed led to the

overrepresentation of the Southern states in the Federal Government. The second called for a two-thirds vote in Congress to declare war or admit new states to the Union. The third called for a sixty day limit on embargoes. The fourth called for a ban on naturalized citizens from holding office. Finally, the fifth called for presidents to be limited to a single term in office and prohibited successive presidents to be from the same state.208

Federalists saw the findings of the Hartford Convention as “the triumph of virtue over calumny. Never did a body of men obtain a more signal victory over their slanderers, or afford more cause of proud exultation to their friends, than the late convention at Hartford.” The Hartford delegates “instead of deserting ‘Virginia in her distress,” had proposed “a stricter Union for mutual defense.” From Virginia, Federalists hailed that “the principal characteristics of this Report are Moderation and Dignity; Perspicuity and Firmness; an ardent Love of Liberty and a due respect for the Laws; a reverence for the Constitution and a sacred regard for the Union of the States.” With the proposed constitutional amendments in hand, Federalists felt that they had been vindicated as true defenders of the Union.209

Republicans, with a call for secession absent from the Convention report, charged that “the mountain was in labor and out crept a mouse.” The Republicans charged that Federalists were hypocrites. “They call upon the U. States to protect them; they complain of the neglect which they have experienced . . . and yet, in the same breath, these Machiavellian intriguers are denouncing the strongest means of defending them.” Beyond that, “the hypocrisy does not end here!—They recommend political combinations and local associations which Washington denounced! And yet are impudent

208 Hickey The War of 1812, 278-280.
enough to call themselves admirers of Washington.” The release of the report of the Hartford Convention did little to quiet debate between Federalists and Republicans. Yet even as the debate continued, all sides awaited news from New Orleans.  

Federalists charged that “Mr. Madison has scarcely raised his little finger to preserve New Orleans, when, as late as last week he laughed heartily at the idea of a serious attack in that quarter by the enemy.” If New Orleans had fallen to the British, the recommendations of the Hartford Convention might have received a full consideration. Instead, Jackson’s victory and the peace treaty, which had preceded the battle by a few days gave the Republicans the break they needed. This turn of events overshadowed the recommendations out of Hartford and left the Federalists out in the cold as Republicans relished their dual victory.

With Jackson’s victory, any Federalist momentum that had been gained following the Hartford Convention was quickly lost. Instead of assuring a place for the Federalists in national politics, the Hartford Convention resulted in the Federalist Party being branded as unpatriotic and obsolete. It was the Republican press who were allowed to define the Hartford Convention and Federalist aims throughout the War of 1812:

The best construction the future historian can put upon their conduct, may be thus expressed; “Finding the government much pressed by the enemy, and the war losing its popularity in some degree in the east . . . with the view to excite still greater discontents among the people, in the hope they might thereof avail themselves, and vault onto the seats of power, the federal party contrived a meeting . . . at Hartford . . . . After remaining in conclave for three weeks . . . they dispersed . . . publishing a sort of party manifesto. Neither the manifesto or their subsequent efforts to redeem the party from the disgrace into which it was precipitated by this preposterous measure, which made all thinking people look about them, and argue, from what it had done, what such a party would do, if it were in power.

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210 Enquirer (Richmond, VA), January 14, 1815.
211 New York Evening Post (NY), January 16, 1815 and Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA), January 14, 1815.
With Jackson’s victory at the Battle of New Orleans and the peace following the Treaty of Ghent, Republicans had a finally gained a decisive advantage in their political struggle with the Federalists. Rather than marking a moment of reemergence for the Federalists, the Hartford Convention was depicted as the height of folly by an outdated political faction. Throughout the course of the War of 1812, Federalists believed themselves to be acting in defense of American liberty and protecting the nation from descending into tyranny. In the build up to the war, Federalists had attempted to point out the abuse of sailors by both the British and French navies. Once the war had begun, the Federalists saw the Baltimore riots and Madison’s policy of retaliation as sure signs that the United States was headed toward tyranny. By 1814, the Hartford Convention was to be for many Federalists, not a prelude to secession, but rather a means by which vigilant American could defend the country from the threat posed by Republican policies. Instead, a favorable turn of events gave the Republicans political advantage and Federalists were soon labeled as traitors bunglers. An examination of the debate surrounding prisoners of war during the War of 1812 offers an opportunity to move beyond this Republican tinted vision of the Federalist opposition and understand the Federalists as they saw themselves.  

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212 *National Intelligencer* cited in the *Columbian* (New York), January 17, 1815.
CHAPTER 5


The critical moments in America’s “second war of independence” came after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed in December of 1814. The most well known of these events was Andrew Jackson’s victory at the battle of New Orleans, which allowed Americans to claim victory in what was otherwise a stalemate. The other, lesser studied, events occurred on the other side of the Atlantic, in England and the Mediterranean. While not celebrated as turning points in American history, the Massacre at Dartmoor prison in England and the final battles of the Barbary Wars in North Africa mark the emergence of a self-confident United States on an international stage. This chapter, in examining these events, seeks to further our understanding of the growing American self-confidence in the wake of the War of 1812.\(^\text{213}\)

The incident at Dartmoor occurred on April 6, 1815 when six American prisoners of war were shot and killed by prison guards. As news of the “massacre at Dartmoor,” began to appear in the United States outrage over the British “barbarity” began to spread throughout the United States. Initial American reaction was little different that it might have been before the War of 1812. In the press and at public events Americans promised

that “the massacre of our countrymen shall never be forgotten nor forgiven.” Accounts of the massacre were reprinted throughout the country in newspapers and as stand alone volumes. Just as they had between 1776 and 1814, Americans viewed an attack on prisoners of war as an attack on the United States. 214

Despite the initial public outcry, the Dartmoor tragedy did not result in a massive long-term public response. Much of the American outrage was quieted by the results of a joint British-American investigation, headed by Charles King of the United States and Francis Seymour Larpent of England. The official investigation concluded that “whilst we lament as we do most deeply, the unfortunate transaction which has been the subject of this inquiry, we find ourselves totally unable to suggest any steps to be taken as to those parts of which it seem most to call for redress and punishment.” While this report alone might have failed to quell public outrage, the simultaneous success of the American Navy in the Mediterranean was enough to focus American attentions elsewhere. 215

The final phase of the Barbary Wars was directly connected to the War of 1812. Shortly after the United States had declared war on England in the summer of 1812, the government of Algiers increased their demand for annual tribute. When the Americans refused, the Dey expelled all Americans and declared war on the United States. Within a month, Algerian corsairs began seizing American vessels, selling their crews into slavery. With the American military thoroughly engaged in a conflict with England, American sailors enslaved in North Africa were once again left to their own devices.

Following the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent in February of 1815, however, Madison immediately asked Congress to declare war on Algiers. Once in the

Mediterranean, the experienced American naval force convinced the Barbary States to end all demand for tribute. The successes of the American forces under “the invincible Decatur,” were celebrated not only for forcing “the barbarians of Algiers to sue for peace,” but also for showing “to the world, that for superior nautical skill, for courage and success in combat, and for humanity in victory, no nation has ever deservedly gained more imperishable renown.”

By the end of 1815, many Americans were more concerned with American military success in North Africa than with the British attack on American sailors. In the wake of the perceived American military success in the War of 1812 and in the Mediterranean, the American government and the American people were willing to paper over the shooting of American prisoners at Britain’s Dartmoor Prison. Rather than pointing to the events at Dartmoor as evidence of British barbarity, Americans came to depict the shooting as the last gasp of a dying empire. Prior to the War of 1812, uncertainty about the future of the young United States led many citizens to view the fate of the nation as the fate of American prisoners of war held by a foreign power. By 1815, with a new sense of self-confidence, Americans no longer viewed the plight of American prisoners of war as directly connected to the fate of the United States.

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For nearly six thousand prisoners of war, the War of 1812 extended well beyond the treaty of Ghent and the battle of New Orleans. These prisoners were held at Dartmoor Prison in England. The prison, as described by one of the detainees, was “situated seventeen miles distant from Plymouth, fourteen from the town or Moorton, and seven from the little village of Tavastock” the prison sat “on the east side of one of the

216 Burlington Gazette (VT), August 25, 1815.
highest and most barren mountains in England.” Adding to the feelings of desolation, Dartmoor was surrounded in all directions “by the gloomy features of a black moor, uncultivated and uninhabited, except by one or two miserable cottages, just discernible in an eastern view, the tenants of which live by cutting turf on the moor, and selling it at the prison.” The whole area was “deprived of everything that is pleasant or agreeable, and is productive of nothing but human woe and misery. Even riches, pleasant friends and liberty could not make it agreeable.” Although the “joyful tidings of peace” had reached the prisoners at Dartmoor by the final days of 1814, their captivity stretched on for nearly another half year. By the spring of 1815, the prisoners had become increasingly restless. On March 4, when the prisoners were denied their standard ration of bread, the prisoners took part in a riot. The captain of Dartmoor was away at Plymouth, and the contractor responsible for providing the captives with food informed them that there would be no bread until the next day. By that evening, the prisoners were convinced that the contractor schemed to deny them fresh bread so that they would willingly accept his store of damaged bread. Charles Andrews recounted the planned response to the situation, “Thus desperate by starvation, we determined to force open the gates in front of the prison, disarm the soldiers, break open the store-house and supply ourselves; and provided the garrison should charge or fire upon us, to make a general attack, and take possession of the guard house and barracks.” When the nightly order was given for the prisoners to return to their barracks, they instead gathered en masse at the front gate of the prison. Confronted with this mass revolt, the guards at the front gate scattered and sounded the alarm, calling the local militia to assist in restoring order.\(^{217}\)

The prisoners organized themselves in front of the store-house and prepared to stand against any attack. Once the Dartmoor guards had recovered from the initial shock of the prisoner revolt, they advanced with fixed bayonets to within two yards of the prisoners. “The soldiers were then brought to a stand by the threats of the prisoners, who all declared, in the most determined tone, that if they attempted to fire or make a charge on them, they must abide by any consequences that would follow.” In addition to the threat of violence against the guard, the prisoners threatened to level the store-house to the ground, “unless the bread was served out immediately. The contractor, clerks, &c. then immediately came forward and entered into this engagement, that if the prisoners would retire into the prison yards, that the bread should be immediately served to them.” This agreement brought an end to the standoff. The prisoners returned to the prison, taking with them one of the clerks who was held hostage until every prisoner had received his usual allowance of bread.  

The next morning, Captain Thomas Shortland returned with reinforcements of two hundred men, having received news that the prisoners had complete control of the garrison. Instead he “found all things quiet and tranquil; as the prisoners had obtained their usual allowance of bread, they were satisfied and sought nothing more. Capt. Shortland made an apology for the fault of the contractor, and things passed on tolerably well.” Most notable about the aftermath of the bread riot was the behavior of a number of prisoners who had escaped into the countryside during the disturbance. “Those that had gone out after remaining all night, came and demanded admittance into the prison again.” The amicable ending to this incident would not be repeated a month later.  

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218 Ibid. 169-170.  
219 Ibid. 168-170.
On the evening of April 6, 1815, a hole was discovered in the inner wall that separated the barrack-yards between prisons number six and number seven, “this hole,” according to one prisoner, “had been made in the afternoon, by some prisoners out of mere play, without any design of escape.” With this discovery, the alarm bells were sounded, and “many of the prisoners ran up to the market square to learn of the cause of the alarm.” Upon arriving in the market square, the prisoners were confronted with several hundred soldiers led by Shortland. At the same time additional soldiers were positioned themselves on the walls around the prison yards. As prisoners ran in different directions “some towards their respective prisons and some towards the market square,” Shortland ordered the soldiers to march against the prisoners. Despite this order, many of Shortland’s officers “refused to take any part, or give any others for the troop to fire.” This refusal was sparked by the officers’ observation “that the terrified prisoners were retiring as fast as so great a crowd would permit, and hurrying and flying in terrible flight, in every direction to their respective prisons.” It is not entirely clear what occurred next. One account claimed that when his officers refused to give the order to fire, “Shortland seized a musket out of the hands of a soldier which he fired.” Charles Andrews contended that ignoring his officers “Capt. Shortland was distinctly heard to give orders to the troops to fire upon the prisoners, although . . . [they] had offered no violence, nor attempted to resist, and the gates all closed.” During the official inquiry several other prisoners recounted having heard Shortland giving the order to fire. One prisoner, James Taylor, claimed that Shortland ordered a charge only to amend his order stating, “it is no use to charge on the damn’d Yankee rascals—FIRE!” Regardless of how it began, the initial shot was soon joined by repeated volleys with “prisoners falling,
either dead or wounded, in all directions, while it was yet impossible for them to enter the
prison.” By the time the soldiers had retreated from the prison, seven prisoners had been
killed and forty to sixty prisoners had been wounded.\textsuperscript{220}

Reports of the event at Dartmoor initially arrived in the United States via the
London press. These early reports placed much of the blame for the “Disturbance at
Dartmoor” on the agent for American prisoners of War in London Reuben G. Beasley.
The London papers reported that the “unfortunate prisoners who amount to 5 or 6000 had
recently become extremely impatient to be set at liberty,” as the result of Beasley’s
delays in securing their departure. According to these reports, the incident began when
the prisoners burned Beasley “in effigy on Friday, & then proceeded to force their way
out of the confines of the prison.” In the face of this prison break, Shortland “went in
among them alone and unarmed to endeavor to pacify them, but a pistol was snapped at
him, and therefore the soldiers fired among the insurgents.” It was only “the prompt
interference of the military” that “quelled the insurrection.”\textsuperscript{221}

Many in the American press were quick to denounce Reuben Beasley for his part
in the events at Dartmoor. In Republican-leaning newspapers around the country he was
attacked for his “disregard of the feelings and interests of the Prisoners in Dartmoor.”
The newspapers charged that he had “maintained the most sullen and contemptuous

\textsuperscript{220}Andrews, \textit{The Prisoner’s Memoirs}, 173. John Melish, \textit{A Description of Dartmoor Prison, with an
Account of the Massacre of the Prisoners}, (Philadelphia: J. Bioren, Printer, 1815), 6. Andrews, \textit{The
Description of Dartmoor Prison}, 10; Andrews, \textit{The Prisoner’s Memoirs}, 178; Reginald Horsman, \textit{The War
of 1812} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 264; Robin F. A. Fabel “Self Help In Dartmoor: Black and

\textsuperscript{221}New York Commercial Advertiser, May 24, 1815; Essex Register (Salem, MA), May 24, 1815; Boston
Daily Advertiser, May 25, 1815; Dedham Gazette (MA), May 26, 1815; Daily National Intelligencer
(Washington DC), May 27, 1815; Republican Star (MD), May 30, 1815.
silence and had refused them the least satisfaction upon those subjects in which it must be supposed their feelings were most deeply interested.” Beasley’s indifference must have only added to the “dissatisfaction occasioned by so long a detention after their countrymen were enjoying the blessing of peace.” These circumstances must have given “rise to the attempt (noticed in the London papers) made by the prisoners on the 6th of April, to break through the gate of the prison, in which 6 to 12 of them were stated to have been killed.”

While some members of the Republican press were willing to denounce Beasley’s actions, members of the Federalist press went further. The editors of the Federal Republican challenged that “If Mr. Beasley has neglected to provide for the speedy liberation of American prisoners as is here stated, he ought to be brought to account for it.” Despite, the “clear truth” of the matter, the editors of the Federal Republican doubted Beasley would face any reprimand. They doubted whether Republican officials would punish Beasley for fear of “impairing party influence,” merely “for the sake of doing some hundred oppressed men justice.” The editors of the Federal Republican used Beasley’s failings to attack the whole of the Madison administration.

In Hudson, New York, the Federalist Northern Whig employed a different tactic. The Northern Whig cleared Beasley of wrong doing arguing instead that, “we are inclined to attribute this unpleasant occurrence to another and very different cause. Mr. Beasley could not, in all probability act in this business without the orders of his own government.” The editors of the Northern Whig argued that the delay in redeeming the American prisoners at Dartmoor was likely a ploy on the part of the Republican

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222 The Enquirer (Richmond, VA), June 3, 1815; Plattsburgh Republican (NY), June 3, 1815; Bennington Newsletter (VT), June 5, 1815.  
223 Federal Republican (Washington D.C.), June 2, 1815.
controlled American government to induce these prisoners to serve in the American Navy. “We have lately seen accounts that two American men of war are expected in England to make up their crews from the prisoners now in confinement there, for the Mediterranean service.” The reason for this plot, according to the Northern Whig, was that as long as “shipping merchants offer greater inducements for seamen to enter their vessels than the government possibly can, our seamen will certainly prefer the merchant service.” Under such circumstances, “we are inclined to think . . . that these 6,000 seamen have been kept in England by the orders of the government, in order to get them if possible by a kind of *ruse de guerre*, on board of the Mediterranean squadron.”

Although many in the American press were willing to accept portions of the British accounts of Dartmoor, “Nautilus,” writing in the Republican leaning *Daily National Intelligencer*, questioned the tone and accuracy of the account of the “Disturbance at Dartmoor Prison.” Running contrary to many of the other American reports on Dartmoor, Nautilus questioned the news from London in its entirety. He began by highlighting the London papers’ use of the term “unfortunate,” noting that such a label for the American prisoners at Dartmoor was an understatement, “For what human being can be more unfortunate that the man, whom ill fortune has thrown a prisoner of war into the hands of Great Britain, and doomed to her Algerine tortures for months and years.” Moving beyond the issue of tone, Nautilus challenged the accuracy of the account itself. “Will any man of common sense believe that a few (for all could not act) unarmed American prisoners could seriously attempt to force their way out of the confines of the prison, in the open face of day, and in full view of an armed soldiery?” Such action would be an act of madness, as the death of the seven prisoners

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224 *Northern Whig* (Hudson, NY), June 6, 1815.
demonstrated. Beyond the irrationality of the plan of escape described in the English account of events, Nautilus questioned the description of Shortland’s response to the disturbance. “It would appear extremely imprudent on the part of Capt. Shortland to venture among them alone and unarmed, unless they were in a defenseless and perfectly quiet state,” because under any other conditions, “we should imagine a British officer to be the last man on earth who ought to go in ‘alone and unarmed’ amongst some thousands of angry Americans, ‘to endeavor to pacify them.’” Nautilus challenged nearly every aspect of the account of the incident at Dartmoor and concluded that “taking the whole transaction then in its clearest and most reasonable point of view, there can no other legitimate inference be drawn from it that that of downright murder—and murder of the most ferocious cast.”

Regardless of the accuracy of any of the accounts, British officials were anxious to prevent any further troubles at Dartmoor. Following the events of April 6, British officials were no longer willing to wait for the American government to make arrangements for the repatriation of the American prisoners. Those prisoners who could provide their own way home were allowed to leave the prison immediately, while those who could not afford the passage home were provided transport at the expense of both the British and American governments. As result of this joint effort, repatriation moved swiftly. By June nearly all of the American prisoners at Dartmoor had been sent home. Many of those who remained by July did so, in part, by choice. Many of the African-Americans at Dartmoor refused to board ships bound for ports in the American South,

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225 *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), June 1, 1815.
fearing that they would be sold into slavery. Despite these delays, by the middle of July, Dartmoor prison had been cleared of American prisoners of war.\[^{226}\]

On June 10, the *New York Weekly Museum* announced the arrival of the “Swedish ship Maria Christiana” with 260 American prisoners. “Among the prisoners on board this ship,” the paper announced, “is Mr. Charles Andrews of this state, who has furnished the editors with a journal of particulars relative to the prisoners at Dartmoor prison, which he intends to publish in a pamphlet.” With the return of the prisoners to the United States, the tone of the coverage of the “incident at Dartmoor” took a distinct turn. No longer was the shooting of the American prisoners of war an “unfortunate incident,” rather the events of April 6, came to be called the “HORRID MASSACRE!!!” Based on the accounts of the prisoners, Reuben Beasley, the American agent, was alleviated of much of the responsibility and instead, American papers began to report that the “affair of the 6th of April was owing to the unpardonable degree of wantonness on the part of the keeper of the prison.” Nautilus’s dissenting evaluation of the situation of a week earlier quickly became the norm.\[^{227}\]

Excerpts and summaries of Andrews’ journal quickly appeared in newspapers throughout the country. Running under the headline “HORRID MASSACRE!!!,” these papers promised an account of the “bloody tragedy performed by the British soldiery.” The journal itself was quickly published as a stand alone volume in New York, with advertisements soon appearing up and down the Atlantic coast. In addition to a description of the events of April 6th, Andrews’ 283 page journal offered a complete

description of his time in Dartmoor, from a detailed description of the buildings to a failed escape attempt in the summer of 1814. Along with Andrews’ Journal, a sixteen page pamphlet entitled *A Description of Dartmoor Prison with an Account of the Massacre of the Prisoners* was published by John Melish in Philadelphia, and in Boston a broadside describing “the Horrid Massacre at Dartmoor Prison England,” was sold to all those interested in the tragedy. In all three accounts, the British Captain Shortland was held accountable for the massacre. The broadside from Boston described a scene “where the unarmed American Prisoners of War were wantonly fired upon by the guard, under the command of the Prison Turn-key, the blood thirsty SHORTLAND, Seven were killed and about Fifty wounded, (several mortally,) without any provocation on the part of our unfortunate American Citizens!” Melish’s pamphlet out of Philadelphia containing “remarks and anecdotes, collected from some of the Prisoners,” described Shortland as “universally execrated among the Prisoners for his inhumanity and cruelty before the late massacre; but they now abhor him as a murderer.” The most vituperative criticism of Shortland came from Andrews himself.  

Andrews’ account of the Dartmoor Massacre centered on Shortland’s role in the attack. Andrews described how even as the men attempted to retreat to their prisons, Shortland gave the order to fire, even though the prisoners were “now completely in his power, and their lives at his disposal, and had offered no violence, nor attempted to resist,

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and the gates all closed.” The prison guard continued to advance even after the initial shots were fired. Once within range, the guards “instantly discharged another volley of musketry on the backs of those farthest out. . . . This barbarous act was repeated in the presence of this inhuman monster, Shortland—and the prisoners fell, either dead or severely wounded, in all directions before his savage sight.” This first wave of violence, however, was not enough for Shortland:

His vengeance was not glutted by the cruel murder of the innocent men and boys, that lay weltering and bleeding in the groans and agonies of death along the prison-doors, but turned and traversed the yard and hunted a poor affrighted wretch, that had flew for safety close under the walls of prison No. 1 . . . these hell-hounds with this deamon a their head and will cool deliberate malice, drew up their muskets to their shoulders and dispatched the unhappy victim, while in the act of imploring mercy at their hands. His only crime was not being able to get into the prison without being shot before.

Andrews ended his account of the massacre with a diatribe against Shortland.

“Shortland! Thou foul monster and inhuman villain! Is thy soul glutted with the blood of the innocent victims, that fate had doomed to they revengeful and blood-thirsty power? . . . Should the laws of your country not doom you to a death of the most severe nature, as a publick example for your well known crimes.”

The accounts of the Dartmoor massacre fundamentally changed the tone in the press. While Federalists had used the initial reports of the incident to attack Reuben Beasley and the Madison administration, the Republicans employed the revised accounts, which blamed the English for the shootings, to go on the offensive. In a column first published in the National Intelligencer and later republished in newspapers throughout the United States, “AN AMERICAN,” decried the “massacre at Dartmoor” as an act of “cowardly and malignant barbarity” on the part of the British. The most heinous aspect of the Dartmoor attack was that it came “in a time of peace, when the passions of war

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have had leisure to subside into forgiveness or oblivion,” yet, even after the war had concluded, the British “entered like butchers into the fold of our unarmed and imprisoned countrymen.” Even with all this evidence of British brutality, an American charged, the Federalist newspapers have “the intolerable insolence to charge us with the crime of hating the English!” What reason, an American questioned, have we “to love them, forsooth, because, two centuries ago their father persecuted our fathers out of their country?” We ought to love them “because they overwhelm us with eternal falsehoods; rob our churches; burn our towns; violate our women; break open our graves; and in a period of profound peace, murder our defenseless prisoners in cold blood?” While the Federalists may hold a feast to honor the “commander of the assassins at Dartmoor,” the Republicans and all true American citizens will recognized the brutality of British actions at Dartmoor.230

On the defensive, the Federal Republican argued that while “every good man—we will not say in America only, but in the Christian world must abhor—must shudder” at the “Dartmoor business,” it is not an excuse to return to war. “The Dartmoor affair,” according to the Federal Republican, has enlivened the hopes of “the faction who rule us,” in their desire to resume the war. “Each war hawk felicitates himself with the assurances that the Union will be soon again plunged in all the comforts of cut-and-thrust work, or as Don Quixote says, ‘up to the elbows in adventures.’” With this growing “military passion,” the United States, “this once happy land—this chosen residence of peace and industry, is to be converted into A BARRACK OF SOLDIERS, in order that one set of miscreants may be elected into office, there to bestride the prostrate country—

230National Advocate (New York), June 16, 1815; American Watchman (Wilmington, DE), June 21, 1815; Albany Argus (NY), June 23, 1815; Western American (Williamsburg, OH), June 24, 1815; Vermont Republican (Windsor), June 26, 1815.
and another set fatten upon the public, and without possessing any other worth than the knavish arts of popular fraud and delusion.” The Republicans, according to the *Federal Republican* were using the “Dartmoor business,” to play up military fears for their own ends, as they had throughout the War of 1812. Yet, their goals were not the defense of the principles of the United States, but rather to “spunge up the means of their fellow citizens, and trample upon their rights.” The motivations of those who rail against the tragic events at Dartmoor are “neither grief nor anger, nor pity, but party cunning actuates them, each partisan assumes the character and brow of Jupiter. . . while tempests and wrath and lightning enve[lo]pe [sic] the head—the heart is cheered by the prospect of party advantage.” The result of all this, the Republicans hope, will be “another war, and then Mr. Monroe will be President, and General Aurora will again have his pay . . . and the federalists will be put down all together.”

The Federalist *Federal Republican* played on many of the same themes that it had employed throughout the War of 1812, but by 1815, following the Hartford Convention and the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans there was little support for their cause. Federalist calls for calm in the wake of the shooting at Dartmoor were taken as pro-British sentiment and dismissed as anti-American. While Federalists tried to play down events at Dartmoor, other papers throughout the United States continued to heatedly discuss the “massacre.” In a letter to the editor printed in New York and Washington, “A Witness” claimed that “the savage and brutal mind of the brutal Shortland,” had been inflamed by “the news of the British defeat at New Orleans,” which he had received “but a few days before the butchery.” It was following this news that the British captain of Dartmoor “bravely revenged upon the defenseless prisoners.”

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231 *The Federal Republican* (Washington, DC), June 17, 1815.
papers across the country called for Americans to “swear eternal hatred” against the English for their actions at Dartmoor. “Read Americans, read over and over the extract from the journal of Mr. Andrews, and the report, on oath of the American prisoners. Read and weep for the injuries of your suffering countrymen.” These injuries should be remembered for generations, “swear to avenge them, let those feelings descend to your children, and to your children’s children, until that nation shall be no more:—Instruct them to lisp the history of that horrible event, and as they gristle into manhood teach them to hate these English.” They called for “the anniversary of the 6th of April [to] be marked by humiliation and prayer for the souls of our fellow citizens thus hurried into eternity. Let us never forget it, and never forgive it.”

Fourth of July celebrations in 1815 marked the highpoint of the national attention to the Dartmoor Massacre. In orations and toasts throughout the United States, speakers reminded their audience of the events at Dartmoor. In an oration delivered in Alfred, Maine, John Holmes reminded his audience that “the cold blooded massacre at Dartmoor prison, is perhaps, without parallel in the history, even of British barbarities.” In West Haven, Vermont, a toast called for justice in the Dartmoor incident. Declaring the shootings to be “in barbarity unequalled,” the speaker stated that, “the laws of God cry aloud for the punishment of the perpetrator,” and asked that the American “government tear away the veil that shall attempt to conceal the crime.” In New York, the revelers at the Tammany society toasted the notion that “the massacre of our countrymen shall never be forgiven.” In Maryland, the “Company of Independent Blues,” called for

232 National Advocate (New York), June 16, 1815; American Watchman (Wilmington, DE), June 21, 1815; Albany Argus (NY), June 23, 1815; Western American (Williamsburg, OH), June 24, 1815; Vermont Republican (Windsor), June 26, 1815. The Columbian (New York), June 17, 1815; Daily National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.), June 23, 1815. American Mercury (Hartford), June 28, 1815; The Ohio Register (Clinton, OH), August 1, 1815.
“Shortland—the assassin of American prisoners” to be brought to justice. The toast was greeted with “hisses” and the “Rogue’s March.” In Salem, Massachusetts, “the officers of the Salem Regiment and a number of Citizens from this town,” toasted “the memory of our brave Countrymen who perished at Dartmoor Prison—May this deed of darkness sit heavy on the souls of their murderers.” The residents of Newark, New Jersey, offered a “silent wave and Washington’s Funeral March” to salute “the memory of our unfortunate countrymen who fell victims to the brutality of the infamous Shortland at Dartmoor prison.”

While many of the toasts assumed a tone of anger at British brutality and focused on the actions of Captain Shortland, the toasts at Boston’s Washington Society assumed a different tone. The Bostonian toast began on a familiar note, calling on Americans to remember “our brethren who were murdered in the prisoners of Dartmoor,” but rather than decrying the villainy of Shortland or England’s barbarity, they went on to declare that the American prisoners had fallen “victims to the last efforts of Britain to retrieve the glory of her army.” This vision of the Dartmoor massacre as a desperate act of a fading power, while in the minority in July of 1815, would eventually become the more common explanation of the events of April 6, 1815, as public attention turned elsewhere.

Public anger over the Dartmoor Massacre was muted in large part by the government response to the shootings. The official investigation took the form of a joint British-American commission. Charles King, who would later serve as editor of the New York American and as president of Columbia University, represented the United States,

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234 Essex Register (Salem, MA), July 8, 1815.
while Francis Seymour Larpent headed up the British side of the investigation.\textsuperscript{235} The commission report, issued from Plymouth, England, on April 26, 1815, was based on an examination of the “proceedings of the several courts of inquiry instituted immediately after the event,” the “depositions taken at the coroner’s inquest,” at which “the jury found a verdict of justifiable homicide,” and the testimony of both English and American witnesses. The commission “further proceeded to a minute examination of the prisons, for the purpose of clearing up some points which upon the evidence alone were scarcely intelligible.” Based on their examination of the evidence, the commissioners were unable to determine “whether the firing first began in the square by order, or was a spontaneous act of the soldiers themselves.” Regardless of the cause of the initial wave of shootings “it seemed clear that it was continued and renewed both there and elsewhere without orders; and that on the platforms, and in several places about the prison, it was commenced without any authority.”\textsuperscript{236}

While the commission was unable to lay blame on Captain Shortland, it was clear to the commissioners that a number of soldiers had acted without orders, continuing to fire into the crowd of prisoners. Further, the commissioners continued, that while the initial shorts may have been warranted to restore order, “under the circumstances it is very difficult to find any justification for the further continuance and renewal of the firing which certainly took place both in the prison yards and elsewhere.” This second wave of firing “appears to have arisen from the state of individual irritation and exasperation on the part of the soldiers who followed the prisoners into their yards, and from the absence of nearly all the officers who might have restrained it.” These continued attacks struck

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\textsuperscript{236} Annals of Congress 14\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 1\textsuperscript{st} Session, 1512-1518.
prisoners who were “endeavoring to enter in the few doors which the turnkeys . . . had left open.” The second wave of shootings seems “to have been wholly without object or excuse, and to have been a wanton attack upon the lives of defenseless, at that time unoffending, individuals.” Based on this conclusion, the commissioners “used every endeavor to ascertain if there was the least prospect of identifying any of the soldiers who had been guilty of the particular outrages here alluded to, or of tracing any particular death at that time to the bring of any particular individual, but without success and all hopes of bringing the offenders to punishment should seem to be at an end.”

While the commission had concluded that there had been wrong doing on the part of a number of the prison guards at Dartmoor, the inability to identify those responsible left the commission without any means to proceed. With such uncertainty, the commission concluded that “while we lament, as we do most deeply, the unfortunate transaction which has been the subject of this inquiry, we had ourselves totally unable to suggest any steps to be taken as to those parts of it which seem most to call for redress and punishment.” Although Congress would request all documents relating to the investigation and eventually set aside funds for the widows and families of those killed on April 6th, the report of the Dartmoor commission effectively brought an end to Dartmoor as a diplomatic incident.

The commission report, issued only three weeks after the shootings in England, reached the United States in mid-July 1815. While there were some who questioned the validity of the report, most notably a group of former Dartmoor prisoners who argued

238 Annals of Congress 14th Congress, 1st Session, 1512-1518. The British government offered to “make provisions for the widows and families of the sufferers” of the incident at Dartmoor in August 1815, although the American government declined the offer but respected “the motives which dictated it.” See Annals of Congress 14th Congress, 1st Session, 1520.
that the commission had failed to consult the victims of the shooting, on the whole the report quieted much of the outrage at the massacre. In the *New Hampshire Patriot* the findings of the commission were printed under the headline “Dartmoor Massacre patched up.” While the memory of Dartmoor would linger, spurred on in part by continued publication of first hand accounts of life in the prison and Congress’s passage of legislation to provide for the widows and families of the victims of Dartmoor, by July of 1816 few toasts recalled the Americans who had lost their lives at Dartmoor.\(^\text{239}\)

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By August of 1815, public attention was turning to events in the Mediterranean. Almost immediately after the United States had declared war on England in 1812, the Dey of Algiers increased his demand for annual tribute to be paid by the United States for safe passage of American merchant ships. When American officials refused these new demands, Algerian corsairs began, once again, to cruise in search of American ships. With American forces preoccupied by the conflict with England, American merchant sailors were once left vulnerable to attack by Algerian forces. In July 1812, only a month after the United States had declared war on England, the American merchant ship *Edwin* was seized by Algerian corsairs and its crew was sold into slavery. As had been the case three decades before, these American sailors were left with a government unable to secure their release. Despite the initial similarity between the American response to the

\(^{239}\) *Niles’ Weekly Register*, August 5, 1815. *New Hampshire Patriot* (Concord), August 1, 1815; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, July 22, 1815; *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington DC), July 14, 1815; *Baltimore Patriot* (MD), July 15, 1815; *Green Mountain Farmer* (Burlington, VT), July 31, 1815. As a point of comparison “Dartmoor” was mentioned in 483 articles in the American press in July 1815, by July 1816 the number had dropped to 17. See graph below.
Barbary threat in 1783 and 1812, by 1815, once the second American war with England had concluded, the American government responded in far more dramatic fashion than it had in 1783.  

Almost immediate after the ratification of the treaty of Ghent, Madison wrote to Congress calling for a declaration of war against Algiers. In his letter, Madison noted Algerian acts of “overt and direct warfare against the citizens of the United States trading in the Mediterranean, some of whom are still detained in captivity, notwithstanding the attempts which have been made to ransom them, and are treated with the rigor usual on the coast of Barbary.” Following Jefferson’s policy of dealing with the Barbary States, Madison called on Congress to fully supply the military allowing for “a vigorous prosecution” of the war. Within two weeks of Madison’s message, both the House and the Senate voted in favor of war with Algiers.

Hoping to bring an end to the annual payment of tribute to the Barbary States, Madison ordered two squadrons to be sent to the Mediterranean. Captain Stephen Decatur led the first squadron out of port on March 20, 1815. Comprised of three frigates, a sloop, four brigs, and two schooners, this collection of ships was the largest naval fleet ever assembled by the United States. In addition to the sizable fleet, Decatur’s own experience in the Mediterranean and during the War of 1812 well prepared him for the expedition. The second squadron, under the command of William Bainbridge, left port two months later. Bainbridge, who was also a veteran of earlier conflicts with the

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Barbary States, commanded a squadron of seventeen warships, nearly double the size of the first wave of American forces.242

The American fleet was instructed to avoid rushed treaties. Secretary of State James Monroe suggested that negotiations should be conducted with the “dread or success” of American naval power. “If a just punishment should be inflicted on those people for the insult and injuries we have received from them . . . the peace might be more durable than if it should be concluded at the first approach of our squadron.” Decatur took this advice to heart, seizing the Algerian flagship the *Mashouda* and the Algerian brig the *Estedio* before sailing to Algiers. The capture of these ships yielded nearly five hundred prisoners of war, who were taken to Cartagena, Spain, to be held during until a peace settlement had been reached.243

Following this success, the Decatur led his squadron to Algiers to begin negotiations. On June 29, Decatur, via the Swedish consul, delivered Madison’s message demanding peace to the Dey. The American seizure of the *Mashouda* and the *Estedio* were a critical component of the negotiations that followed. As Decatur later reported to Congress, “the impression made by these events was visible and deep.” Upon confirming the American victories, the captain of the port was sent by the Dey to negotiate with the Americans. The Dey initially requested a cease fire and that negotiations be conducted on Algerian soil, however, Decatur refused both demands insisting that hostilities would cease only after a treaty had been signed and that negotiations would take place on board the American ships. When the Algerian delegation returned a day later, Decatur noted that “their anxiety appeared extreme to conclude the peace immediately.” Decatur then

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presented the American demands, refusing to negotiate on any point, including a demand that Algiers pay reparations for damage to American property. The Algerian negotiator feared that the Dey would reject the treaty as a demand for reparations “had never before been made upon Algiers.” Despite this reservation, the Algerian negotiators “came back within three hours, with the treaty signed as we had concluded it, and the prisoners.” Peace with Algiers had finally been achieved on American terms. Thirty years after the United States had first been exposed to the threat of Algerine corsairs a lasting peace had finally been established. In having concluded these negotiations, Decatur believed that this treaty “places the United States on higher ground than any other nation.” In the wake of the success in Algiers, Decatur sailed to Tunis and Tripoli bringing a final end to the long standing conflict with the Barbary States.²⁴⁴

During the War of 1812, the American press had paid scant attention to the renewed Algerian threat. As Americans debated the treatment of prisoners of war, one Federalist newspaper found it strange that with all the attention to the treatment of prisoners that “not a single expression of regret is heard for the fate of the captive American who is doomed to wear out his days in the dungeons of Algiers.” Despite the limited coverage of Algiers during the war, almost immediately after the treaty of Ghent had been signed, there were calls for war with Algiers. In both Republican and Federalist newspapers editors called for war. “The day of peace with England ought to be the day of War against Algiers.” The Richmond, Virginia Enquirer declared that “not one moment should be lost in equipping our navy to attack the Pirate. He should give up our captive countrymen and relinquish his annual tribute, or his town should be battered about his ears. We could not wish a finer school for our navy. The Tripolitan war

²⁴⁴ American State Papers, Senate, 14th Congress, 1st Session, vol. 4, 6.
brought great talents to light. A war with Algiers would be productive of the same benefits.” In New Hampshire, *The Portsmouth Oracle* hoped that “our government” has “not forgotten that the Dey of Algiers is at war with America—the crew of one unfortunate ship at least have been languishing in slavery nearly three years—during the present transport of joy at the return of peace with Britain, it is devoutly to be wished that these forlorn captives may be redeemed.” The *Boston Gazette* added that “the idea of paying tribute or succumbing to any power is abhorrent to our feelings. The policy of some European powers in purchasing peace with Algiers, may be accounted for from commercial views; but our country is bound to command respect from them, by the influence of their cannon, rather than tribute or ransom money.” It was the hope of the editors of the *Gazette* that “our gallant tars will be employed against them, unless they yield to the dictates of peace and justice.”

As Congress moved toward a declaration of war in March, the renewed focus on the Barbary States infiltrated much of American life. Newspapers from Boston to Ohio published a brief history of American involvement with the Barbary States. This narrative made special note of the incomplete nature of the settlements that had followed each of the earlier conflicts with the North African nations and the humiliations that the United States had suffered at the hands of the Barbary States. In Albany, New York, Susanna Rowson’s play *American in Algiers, or, a Struggle for Freedom* returned to the stage in late March. While the Dartmoor Massacre redirected national attention in early

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summer of 1815, it was not long before American attention returned to the
Mediterranean.\footnote{Boston Daily Advertiser, March 16, 1815; Daily National Intelligencer (Washington DC), March 23, 1815; Farmers Cabinet (Amherst, NH), March 25, 1815; Mechanic’s Gazette (Baltimore, MD) March 29, 1815; The Weekly Recorder (Chillicothe, OH), April 12, 1815; The Western Monitor (Lexington, KY), April 21, 1815.}

On Independence Day 1815, toasts anticipating success of American victory in the Mediterranean were offered along side toasts commemorating the Dartmoor Massacre. The company of Independent Blues in Baltimore toasted the “American Squadron commanded by our gallant Decatur—when they meet the Algerines may they teach those barbarians to respect our Stripes if they do not reverence our Stars.” Fourth of July revelers in Salem, Massachusetts toasted “the Navy of the United States—first in deeds of glory—may it continue to be first in the affections of the American people.” In West Haven, Vermont a toast to “our Algerine squadron—victory exulting perches on their prows, while the rolling billows foaming, grant them passage to their ill advised enemies,” was greeted with three cheers. The members of the Carlisle Guards in Pennsylvania toasted “those gallant spirits, our brave officers and their crews composing the present expedition against Algiers—may they return to their country victorious, crowned with laurels, glorious triumphant.” The people of New Sharon, Maine toasted “our hardy Tars—in battle invincible, humane as brothers to the vanquished.” The celebration in the town of Salisbury, New Jersey hoped that “whilst the Legitimate and Illegitimate Sovereigns of Europe are engaged in their vocations of slaughter, may the sovereigns of America have the glory of subjugating the barbarians of Algiers.” The
citizens of Delhi, New York called for a remembrance of all “American captives—From Indians, British, and Algerines, good Lord deliver them.”

By August of 1815 news of Decatur’s success began to reach the United States. Accounts of the American capture of the Algerian corsairs spread quickly across the United States. These reports noted that the Americans now “had on board 400 Algerine prisoners, with the declared intention of beheading them in sight of Algiers, should the report be true, that the crew of an American vessel had been put to the sword in Algiers.” News of the subsequent peace treaty with Algiers was celebrated as “achieving more than all Europe has been able to do.” The Daily National Intelligencer marked the news of the American victory laying out the “prospect before us.” The war in Algiers had served as a “new theater of glory for our tars.” Once the conflict with England had ended, the American navy with “eagle rapidity . . . pounced upon the man stealing barbarian, and in a measure, already annihilated his marine . . . and threatened his capital!” The victory was made all the greater as it was this “youth republic” that had “the high honor of reducing this nest of pirates, so long the pest of the christian world, to an observance of the rights of peace and war; and make the civilized nations of Europe blush for that vile jealousy, wicked policy, and dirty calculation of interest which induced them to permit or endure such depredations.” Looking to the future the editors of the Intelligencer saw the victory in Algiers as a defining moment as the young United States stepped onto the world stage.


The view from London looked strikingly similar. An American in London, wrote that “the first operations of the American squadron have been followed by the recession of the Algerine pirates from their infamous, but, until hitherto, usual demand of tribute. The example of the United States government, we trust, will not be lost the other maritime powers of Europe.” William Cobbett, the erstwhile “Peter Porcupine,” now living in London, wrote congratulating the United States on its victory. Algiers was, Cobbett noted, “a sort of a cur,” but now, “you have broken his jaws, and made him retire to his den.” Such an action was “truly a noble use to make of naval power! It cannot fail to enhance your fame, to give pleasure to your friends, and to add to the mortification and vindictiveness of your enemies.”

The return of the American squadron was marked with celebration which was “cheered by applause—hailed with welcome, and crowned with glory. In a few months Decatur, with a few vessels, has done more towards humbling the corsairs of Barbary, than Charles the Vth could effect by a fleet and army.” Some celebrated the return of the naval force looking to antiquity for comparable action. The American Watchman asked “What was the Navy at the commencement of the late war? It increased more than double, not by the expense of building them, but by glorious capture!” The American Navy was like that of “the infant Hercules” who was “too mighty for the wily serpent,” and “not only encounter him with success; but WHEN THE DAY OF HIS MATURITY

249 Federal Republican (Washington DC), September 18, 1815; Boston Daily Advertiser, September 18, 1815; The Columbian (NY), September 19, 1815; Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), September 21, 1815; Alexandria Herald (VA), September 25, 1815. Baltimore Patriot (MD), October 17, 1815; Vermont Republican (Windsor), October 30, 1815; American Advocate (Hallowell, ME), November 11, 1815.
SHALL ARRIVE, WE HAVE THE MOST FLATTERING FOREBODING THAT HE WILL BE ABLE TO VANQUISH THE MONSTER!”

The *Baltimore Patriot* claimed that “knowing the gallant Decatur in times past, when outlines of his character were just unfolding, we saw in him that superior something—that genius, and chivalric cast of mind which distinguish the hero from the phlegmatic fighting officer.” Based on these early indications, “the fortunes of Decatur have been with us a subject of peculiar interest.” Now following the negotiations in Algiers we see that he has “commanded a peace upon terms more honorable than was ever before granted to an European nation, either by Algiers, Tunis, or Tripoli.” To the actions of Decatur, “the language of Caesar could never have been more appropriately applied. The Barbarians of Africa humbled by a boldness truly characteristic of its author, and peculiarly situated to the occasion, in the language of that celebrated conqueror of antiquity, he might have said to his countrymen—‘I came, I saw, I conquered.’ Such . . . is the Illustrious Decatur.”

Around the nation’s capitol dinners were held to honor the returning fleet. In December, “the citizens of Baltimore, always ready to testify their high sense of the merits of our naval and military heroes . . . gave to the Gallant DECATUR a public dinner.” Held at the Fountain Inn, “a crowded company welcomed the entrance of Commodore Decatur; and the tables were honoured by the presence of all the officers of the navy now on this station.” The toasts at the end of the evening highlighted “the valor we celebrate—It has illustrated the brightest page of our history; it deserves our deepest gratitude,” along with noting that “Algiers and the other Barbary powers” had been

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251 *Baltimore Patriot* (MD), December 19, 1815.
“taught by Decatur’s gallant squadron to respect the laws of nations.” A month later, in Washington DC, “a number of the citizens of Pennsylvania now in this city and the greater part of the Pennsylvania delegation in Congress . . . gave a dinner at McKeowin’s Hotel to commodore Decatur and captain Stewart.” Where they “sat down to dinner and spent the evening with the purest harmony and good humor.” At the end of the dinner, of the Congressmen from Pennsylvania presented a song entitled “Yankee Tars,” which celebrated:

“our Yankee Tars, to Afric’s shore;  
Our Heroes, lastly led ‘em— 
And Turkish banners bow before 
the starry flag of Freedom.”

The refrain called on the revelers to:

toast the brave, for they will save 
Columbia’s fame from sinking:  
The honor’d scars of Yankee Tars 
Are glorious themes for drinking.

Accounts of these dinners (along with the full text of Yankee Tars) were published throughout the United States, offering all American to appreciate the celebration of the American naval victories.252

Finally, the American victory also became the center piece of political speeches. Vermont Governor Jonas Galusha, in his state of the state address which was republished around the country, celebrated “the brave Decatur, and his gallant fellows,” who “in the space of a few days, humbled the Dey of Algiers and compelled him to accept a peace dictated by the victor. This, several of the great naval powers of Europe have frequently

252 American Beacon (Norfolk, VA) January 2, 1816. Daily National Intelligencer (Washington, DC), January 15, 1816; American Beacon (Norfolk, VA), January 2, 1816; National Advocate (NY), January 19, 1816; New Hampshire Patriot (Concord), January 30, 1816. American Watchman (Wilmington, DE) January 20, 1816; The Yankee (Boston, MA), January 26, 1816; Vermont Republican (Windsor), February 5, 1816; New Jersey Journal (Elizabethtown), February 20, 1816.
attempted in vain.” In New York, the governor celebrated the victory of “Decatur, with a few gallant tar,” who had done “what Europe united had ever considered impossible. Algiers, as well as Britain, has bowed the neck to the Empire of the West.” Most significantly, Madison began his State of the Union address in 1815 noting that he had “the satisfaction, on our present meeting, of being able to communicate to you the successful termination of the war which had been commenced against the United States by the Regency of Algiers.” He went on to celebrate Decatur’s daring in seizing two Algerian ships, and then “having prepared the way by his demonstration of skill and prowess, he hastened to the port of Algiers where peace was promptly yielded to his victorious force.” In address the status of the United States, Madison’s first priority was to celebrate the American victory in the Mediterranean. While he highlighted the successful implementation of the treaty of Ghent, Madison made no mention of the Dartmoor Massacre. In assessing the state of the United States in December 1815, the president and a wide cross-section of the American people, saw American reflected in the victory at Algiers rather than massacre at Dartmoor.\textsuperscript{253}

To many, Decatur’s victory in Algiers was a seminal moment in American history. More even than the American “victory” over the British in the War of 1812, the defeat of the Barbary Pirates demonstrated to the world the strength of the United States. As the \textit{Daily National Intelligencer} observed, “they who prostrated the bloody cross will bring down the pale crescent—the eagle on the ocean will not desert the pine tree’s top

\textsuperscript{253} \textit{National Standard} (Middlebury, VT), October 18, 1815; \textit{Independent Chronicle} (Boston), October 23, 1815; \textit{Albany Argus} (NY), October 24, 1815; \textit{Sentinel of Freedom} (Newark, NJ) October 31, 1815; \textit{American Beacon} (Norfolk, VA) November 1, 1815. \textit{Northern Whig} (Hudson, NY), January 23, 1815. \textit{American Beacon} (Norfolk, VA), December 9, 1815; \textit{Green Mountain Farmer} (Bennington, VT), December 11, 1815; \textit{Independent Chronicle} (Boston), December 11, 1815; \textit{Washington Whig} (Bridgeton, NJ), December 11, 1815; \textit{American Advocate and Kennebec Advertiser} (Hallowell, ME), December 16, 1815; \textit{Weekly Recorder} (Chillicothe, OH), December 20, 1815.
that was his nesting place in the forest.” The United States had defeated England and subjugated the Barbary States. The Eagle stood proud.254

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By the summer of 1816, American newspapers celebrated as a joint British and Dutch force prepared an attack on Algiers. The American papers believed that Decatur’s victory and subsequent treaty “were so favourable, that it excited European envy.” So successful had the American forces been in achieving that which the European powers had failed to do on so many occasions that Decatur’s victory “was a tacit reproach upon” the Europeans, “and it stimulated their jealousy to exercise.” There were, however, deeper meanings to this turn of events. The Baltimore Federal Republican argued that “there is a strong probability that all the Christian powers will unite for the extirpation of the barbary marauders. It is extremely astonishing to observe by what invisible chains the attention of the civilized world is now turning to Palestine.” This combined effort, sparked by American success in Algiers would serve “to recover that consecrated spot from the hands of the infidels,” and lead to the “exclusion of the Turks from Palestine, and consequently the return of the Jews to Jerusalem.” This event the Federal Republican argued was “near at hand,” and the United States in bringing the other Christian nations to this moment had served as “instruments in an Almighty hand.”255

The expansion of American self confidence following the War of 1812 was as much as result of a final American victory over the Barbary States as it was a perceived

254 Daily National Intelligencer (Washington DC), September 9, 1815.

255 The Baltimore Federal Republican (MD), June 8, 1816; New York Commercial Advertiser (NY), June 10, 1816; Delaware Gazette (Wilmington), June 10, 1816; Alexandria Gazette (VA), June 11, 1816; American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia), June 12, 1816; Rhode Island American (Providence), June 14, 1816; Portland Gazette (ME), June 18, 1816; Western Monitor (Lexington, KY), July 5, 1816. For a more complete examination of the American focus on Palestine and the Middle East in this period see Michael Oren, Power, Faith, and Fantasy (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).
second victory over England. An examination of the press coverage of the Dartmoor
Massacre and Decatur’s victory in Algiers helps underscore this point:
Figure 2: Early American Newspaper Database Coverage of the “Dartmoor Massacre” and the End of the Barbary Wars April 1815-August 1816 (See Appendix B)
In the immediate aftermath of the Dartmoor Massacre, the tone of much of the American response suggested a lingering sense of vulnerability. Americans reacted to news of the Dartmoor Massacre much as they had to descriptions of conditions on British prison ships in New York harbor during the American Revolution. In both cases Americans decried the treatment of the defenseless Americans at the hands of their barbarous British captors.

The tone of the American response began to turn following the official report, but more significantly as news of the American expedition against Algiers began to filter back to the United States. In late June 1815, a letter from one of the prisoners in Algiers, Captain Smith, arrived in Salem, Massachusetts and was reprinted in area newspapers, it had made it as far as Boston and New York by the Fourth of July, eventually traveling around the country. Smith informed his readers that Algiers was in a state of “tumult and consternation,” and he had “not doubt,” that the appearance of a strong American fleet “would be the means of effecting an immediate peace.” This letter may well have served to influence Boston’s Washington Society’s toast which viewed the Dartmoor Massacre as “the last efforts of Britain to retrieve the glory of her army.”

As news of Decatur’s victory in the Mediterranean spread through the United States, the promise to never forget and never forgive the Dartmoor incident fell by the wayside. Instead Americans celebrated a bright future in which the United States stood as an equal to all the European powers. By July 1816, the combined British-Dutch

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256 Dedham Gazette (MA), June 30, 1815; Evening Post (New York), June 30, 1815; Alexandria Herald (VA), July 5, 1815; American Advocate and Kennebec Advertiser (Hallowell, ME), July 8, 1815; The Union (Washington, KY), July 14, 1815; Western American (Williamsburg, OH), July 22, 1815. Essex Register (Salem, MA), July 8, 1815.
assault on Algiers suggested that the United States, following their success in the Mediterranean, stood as one of the leading powers in the world.\textsuperscript{257}

\textsuperscript{257} \textit{American Mercury} (Hartford), June 28, 1815; \textit{The Ohio Register} (Clinton, OH), August 1, 1815.
EPILOGUE

On June 17, 1994, O.J. Simpson, former NFL star and actor, led the Los Angeles police in a low speed chase through the streets of Southern California. On that day, Simpson had been scheduled to turn himself in as a leading suspect in the murder of his ex-wife. When Simpson had failed to appear at the appointed time, Los Angeles authorities issued a warrant for his arrest. As Simpson’s white Ford Bronco continued to lead a parade of LAPD cruisers down the interstate, the chase was joined by a bevy of news helicopters and reporters. The chase and the murder trial that followed marked the coming of age of the twenty-four hour cable news networks. Legal and media analysts were hired by the networks to offer their take on events. Simpson’s defense team, the city prosecutor, and the presiding Judge became minor celebrities. The late night comedy program Saturday Night Live parodied the proceedings in numerous sketches. The trial of O.J. Simpson marked a transformative moment in the American public sphere, focusing national attention on the possible imprisonment of an American sports star and reshaping the national media. An examination of the history of the United States reveals that the American past is full of such “O.J. Simpson moments,” in which media events captured and crystallized American opinion.  

From the earliest moments of the American Revolution through the end of the Barbary Wars, the imprisonment of Americans by a foreign power served as a lighting rod at key moments in the development of the American public sphere. While the

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258 I am indebted to John Brooke for the idea of the “O.J. Simpson Moment.”
politics of each of the situations discussed in this work are in and of themselves
significant, their impact on the American public is equally important. The stories of these
prisoners were reprinted in newspapers around the country and read by thousands of
Americans who formed their own opinion of how the United States ought to respond to
the threat, and with this information, Americans from all classes of society joined in the
debate. From the halls of Congress to the prisons of North Africa, Americans followed
the stories of the prisoners and joined in national debate.

During the American Revolution, it was the conditions face by American
prisoners of war, held aboard British prison ships, that helped to sway public opinion
toward the Patriot cause. This debate also set the tone for the decades to follow as the
prisoners themselves joined the discussion in contributions ranging from Congressional
testimony to the publication of captivity narratives. In the years following Independence,
the capture and enslavement of American sailors by the Barbary States of North Africa
served to focus national attention on the need for a stronger national government and
aided in the push for a new constitution. When the Washington administration failed to
resolve the crisis in North Africa, the plight of these American sailors led active
American citizens to join in the efforts to redeem the captive Americans, much to
Washington’s displeasure. Following the election of 1800, it was the Federalists who
employed the plight of imprisoned Americans to focus national attention on what they
viewed as the failings and corruption of the Jefferson and Madison administrations.
Finally, an examination of the response of the American public to the “Massacre at
Dartmoor” and the final American victory in Algiers reveal the changing nature of the
American self image in the second decade of the nineteenth century.
These earliest of these “O.J. Simpson” moments served to focus national attention and push the bounds of the American public sphere to include a wide cross-section of the American population. The plight of American prisoners held captive by a foreign power shaped the development of American politics and culture in the Early American Republic in ways that few other events could have. The spectacle of captivity and imprisonment ultimately worked to expand American freedom in the realm of the public sphere.
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Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia, PA)
Providence Gazette (RI)
Providence Patriot (RI)

Repertory (Boston, MA)
Republican Farmer (Bridgeport, CT)
Republican Star (Easton, MD)
Rhode Island American (Providence, RI)
Rhode Island Republican (Newport, RI)

Salem Gazette (Salem, MA)
South Carolina State Gazette and Timothy’s Daily Advertiser (Charleston, SC)
Spooners Vermont Journal (Windsor, VT)
State Gazette of South Carolina (Charleston, SC)
Stewart’s Kentucky Herald (Lexington, KY)
Story and Humphrey’s Pennsylvania Mercury (Philadelphia, PA)

Trenton Federalist (NJ)
True American (Bedford, PA)

Vermont Journal (Windsor, VT)
Vermont Republican (Windsor, VT)
Virginia Journal (Alexandria, VA)

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Weekly Museum (New York, NY)
Western American (Williamsburg, OH)
Western Monitor (Lexington, KY)
Western Star (Stockbridge, MA)
Winchester Gazette (VA)
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Cathcart Family Papers at the New York Public Library

George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress

John Jay Papers at Columbia University

James Madison Papers at the University of Virginia

Journals of the Continental Congress at the Library of Congress

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Journal of the United States Senate at the Library of Congress

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APPENDIX A

EARLY AMERICAN NEWSPAPER DATABASE COVERAGE OF THE CONFLICT WITH TRIPOLI AND THE IMPRESSMENT OF AMERICAN SAILOR 1794-1816
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tripoli</th>
<th>Impressment</th>
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<td>1794</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1795</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1796</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1797</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1798</td>
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<tr>
<td>1799</td>
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<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>1631</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1802</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1805</td>
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<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
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Table 1. Early American Newspaper Database Coverage of the Conflict with Tripoli and the Impressment of American Sailors 1794-1816
APPENDIX B

EARLY AMERICAN NEWSPAPER DATABASE COVERAGE OF THE “DARTMOOR MASSACRE” AND THE END OF THE BARBARY WARS APRIL 1815-AUGUST 1816
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Table 2. Early American Newspaper Database Coverage of the “Dartmoor Massacre” and the End of the Barbary Wars April 1815-August 1816