PERSPECTIVES ON SLAVERY: BEAUMONT'S *MARIE* AND TOCQUEVILLE'S *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA*

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INTRODUCTION

While we are all familiar with Alexis de Tocqueville and his book *Democracy in America*, less known is the name of Gustave de Beaumont, Tocqueville's traveling companion during his journey through America in 1831. The two Frenchmen came to America under the auspices of the French government. Their official task was to conduct a study of American prisons, which were then in the forefront of the new movement to rehabilitate criminals. Although both men had a serious and continuing interest in prison reform, they had larger aims as well. Initially, they intended to publish a joint work on American institutions and mores. The plan seemed to be to divide their labors, with Tocqueville writing on American institutions and Beaumont writing on American manners and mores, and then to publish the two studies in one volume. But quite soon the idea of a collaborative study was set aside and in 1835 Tocqueville and Beaumont each published a separate work on America. Tocqueville's book, the first volume of *Democracy in America*, was immediately heralded as a masterpiece, and Tocqueville himself acclaimed as the Montesquieu of his century. Beaumont's book, a novel entitled *Marie, or Slavery in the United States*, was a critical and popular success also. Now however, Beaumont is pretty much forgotten, even in the wake of the tremendous resurgence of interest in Tocqueville since the 1950s. Perhaps Beaumont is worth another look.

Before turning to Beaumont's *Marie*, a brief comment on the friendship between Tocqueville and Beaumont is in order. The German poet Heinrich Heine referred to Tocqueville and Beaumont as the "inseparables," joined together in travel, publications, and in the Chamber of Deputies.[1] Indeed, they seemed to have conceived of their lives as a shared enterprise. They were successful to such an extent that friends and enemies alike on occasion confused them with one another: "an electoral list of the dynastic opposition listed the candidate from St.

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[1] Heinrich Heine, *Allemands et Français*, cited in Seymour Drescher, TOCQUEVILLE AND BEAUMONT ON SOCIAL REFORM 201 (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

Calais . . . as 'Alexis de Beaumont.'"[2] And Jean-Jacques Ampère, in a poem about Tocqueville, refers to Beaumont as "that other you."[3] Although temperamentally quite different, they were astoundingly attuned to each other's views on essential, and most non-essential, matters. "On one [rare] occasion, when Tocqueville disagreed with Beaumont's ideas on military strategy in Algeria, he simply kept public silence on the issue until he could convince his friend to change [what he called] 'our' position."[4] The designation "our" applies to their intellectual endeavors, as well as their political opinions. They engaged in continuous conversation and exchange. Moreover, each put his own fund of notes and diaries and documentation at the disposal of the other and as a result, even those works authored separately bear the marks of their collaboration—to such an extent that "it is often impossible to discover who originated a given idea."[5]

Nonetheless, I think it undeniable that of the two, Tocqueville had the superior mind and pen, a fact which Beaumont himself early and generously recognized. As in the pairing of Marx and Engels, where Marx justly receives the lion's share of posterity's attention, so too with Tocqueville. Yet perhaps our interest in Tocqueville can be expanded to embrace Beaumont. Tocqueville himself, at two different points in *Democracy in America*, urges us to look to Beaumont's work.[6]

American Mores: The Power of Prejudice

The first thing to note about Beaumont's book is its unusual form. *Marie* is a novel; or rather, half novel, for appended to the story of Marie are extensive notes and appendices. There are three substantial essays (on the social and political condition of blacks, religion in America, and the Indian tribes), as well as shorter notes on American women, blue laws, polygamy, the theater, dueling, and other topics. It is a curious way to write a novel. Beaumont hoped that this mongrel production would secure a larger audience—that the notes would testify to his

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[2] Drescher, *id.* at 206, n.5.

[3] Jean-Jacques Ampère, *La Démocratie: à M. de Tocqueville,* cited in Drescher, *supra* note 1, at 201.

[4] Drescher, *supra* note 1, at 205.

[5] Id. at 213.

[6] In the Introduction to *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville praises the forthcoming *Marie*. Later in a footnote to his own long chapter on race relations, Tocqueville again refers the reader to *Marie* and asserts that "Beaumont has plumbed the depths of a question which my subject has allowed me merely to touch upon." 1 DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA XVIII, 370, n.30 (New York: Vintage Books, 1945)(hereinafter Tocqueville).

intellectual seriousness, while the novel would attract readers in search of sentimental entertainment. He sought to unite the head and the heart. In fact, despite the book's initial success, *Marie*'s fate was that of so many half-breeds—it was rejected by both camps. Perhaps today, we can be more appreciative of its aspiration, while acknowledging its failures of execution.

Although Tocqueville and Beaumont abandoned the idea of a collaborative work on America, they adhered to the original division of labor, with Tocqueville writing on institutions and Beaumont on mores. Both Tocqueville and Beaumont acknowledge this in their respective prefaces. In his Introduction to Volume I of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville explains that he had intended to produce a second volume, dealing with the influence of equality "on civil society, on habits, ideas, and customs," but that Beaumont was doing that task better than he could—"set[ting] forth to the public the principal traits of the American character."[7]

Interestingly, Beaumont subtitles his book "Slavery in the United States: Catalogue of American Mores" in contrast to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America.* The nation is presented by the two Frenchmen like the Greek god Janus, with two opposite faces. Beaumont remarks that some readers may think that he and Tocqueville formed very different judgments about the country they visited together, but that, Beaumont says, would be a mistake. The apparent dissonance is owing to the fact that "M. de Tocqueville has described the institutions; I myself have tried to sketch the customs. Now, in the United States, political life is far finer, and more equitably shared, than civil life."[8] When Beaumont looks at America, what he sees is black and white, slavery and mastery, a massive injustice at the heart of the nation.

Tocqueville of course was not unaware of this. His working title for *Democracy in America* was "The Sovereign Power of Democracy in the United States." The sovereignty of the *demos* means the sovereignty of

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[7] Five years later, after Tocqueville had recovered his enthusiasm for the project and completed the second volume of *Democracy in America*, he added a footnote which, while continuing to praise Beaumont, offers a slightly different assessment of *Marie*. He now says that "Beaumont's primary purpose was to portray clearly and accurately the position of Negroes in Anglo-American society." Tocqueville, Vol I, Introduction, at 15, n.1. Thus, while *Marie* can be read as Beaumont's version of the second volume of *Democracy in America*, it would seem that Tocqueville , in the end, did not regard Beaumont's novel as having exhausted the subject of American mores.

[8] Gustave de Beaumont, MARIE; OR, SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES: A NOVEL OF JACKSONIAN AMERICA 7 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958) (trans. Barbara Chapman) (hereinafter Beaumont).

the majority, and that raises the spectre of majority tyranny (slavery being its most extreme manifestation). In his discussion of majority tyranny (chapter 15), Tocqueville mentions the exclusion of free blacks from civil rights, not by law but by the force of majority opinion and the implied threat of violence against any free black man who should presume to exercise his lawful rights. Although the law in the North proclaimed equality, public opinion wouldn't allow it.[9]

The "slavery" of Beaumont's title refers to much more than the South's "peculiar institution." Beaumont, like Tocqueville, is confident that chattel slavery is a doomed institution—religion, economics, and the spirit of the age are all against it. Beaumont gives to the word "slavery" a larger and more lasting significance. He refers not so much to the practice as to the prejudice behind it. The perduring force of public opinion is such, Beaumont posited, that the legacy of slavery will be more intractable than slavery itself. In the foreword to his novel, Beaumont notes that

> It is this prejudice . . . which forms the principal subject of my book. I wished to show how great are the miseries of slavery, and how deeply it affects traditions, after it has legally ceased to exist. It is, above all, these secondary consequences of an evil whose first cause has disappeared which I have endeavored to develop.[10]

Beaumont is as prescient as Tocqueville. In an era (the 1830s) when most Americans had not yet squarely faced the slavery question,[11] Beaumont was already reflecting on the question of race, wondering how blacks and whites would, or could, live together post slavery. His focus on the consequences of slavery accounts for the curious fact that a novel supposedly about slavery contains no slaves, no Southern plantation scenes, nor even former slaves (freedmen or fugitives recently released or escaped from bondage). It is instead a story of individuals born and bred in freedom, as white citizens, who suddenly learn they are "black," or what the world regards as black. It is a story of prejudice and identity. Perhaps not surprisingly, the book was not translated into English until 1958, at a time when America began to confront segregation and racism. Beaumont wrote a century and a quarter ahead.

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[9] Tocqueville, at I.XV, 271. See also I.XVIII, 374-75.

[10] Beaumont, at 6.

[11] In 1831, the year of Tocqueville and Beaumont's visit, there occurred two events which would do much to concentrate the American mind: the publication of the first issue of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* and Nat Turner's rebellion.

Marie begins with a traveling Frenchman who happens upon another Frenchman living the life of a hermit in the wilds of Michigan. This meeting provides an opportunity for the traveler to induce the hermit, Ludovic, to relate the story of his life and misfortunes. Ludovic had come to America in search of new horizons and had fallen in love with the daughter of his American host. When Ludovic presses his marriage suit, the father is forced to reveal the young woman's true situation to him. The daughter, Marie, though to all appearances a white woman (her complexion "even whiter than the swans of the Great Lakes"[12]), is in truth, a mulatto, or more precisely her great-great-grandmother had been a mulatto, and thus Marie is 1/32 part black. The father, Daniel Nelson, had married a New Orleans woman, Theresa, whom he had assumed to be white and by whom he had two children, George and Marie. A disgruntled suitor, who had lost out to Daniel, discovered and revealed the secret of Theresa's origins. The revelation led to persecution. Daniel, his wife, and children were hounded from society. Theresa died grief-stricken, and Daniel Nelson took refuge with his children in Baltimore, where no one knew their secret. Hearing this tale of woe, Ludovic remains firm in his desire to marry Marie. The father, however, imposes a test. Ludovic must travel through America for six months, observing the position and treatment of blacks, and then decide whether he could commit himself to the alliance. Despite all he learns of the virulence of American race hatred, Ludovic's love for Marie abides. But tragedy ensues as their enemy pursues them and exposes them in Baltimore and then in New York. The news of their intended marriage sparks a race riot (based on the New York race riots of 1834, the catalyst for which was indeed a number of mixed marriages and abolitionist support for such unions). Ludovic and Marie flee to the frontier. The journey saps Marie's health; she dies and Ludovic's spirit is broken.

The central chapter of the novel is entitled "Revelation." Here Ludovic learns the truth of Marie's origins, and, more importantly, the reader learns of the psychological effects the revelation had upon Marie and her elder brother George. Marie has accepted the judgment of public opinion, and believes it to be in accord with (if not the same thing as) the will of God. She regards herself as a member of an accursed race, unworthy of Ludovic's love. Her racial shame augments her feminine modesty. Today we might say she is a victim of self-hatred, except that for Marie self-hatred is transmuted into the virtues of humility and charity. Marie spends her days at the Baltimore Almshouse ministering

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[12] Beaumont, at 58.

to "the poor, the ill, and the mad."[13] She becomes an angel of mercy. Marie is in many respects like the character of Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* written 17 years later in 1852. There is, however, a crucial difference. Tom is a true Christian. Unlike Marie, he knows of the equality of souls before God, and is thus fully aware of the wrongs done him. Yet he also knows that in the long run, that is, under the aspect of eternity, those wrongs hurt his oppressors more than they hurt him. The slavery he suffers is of the body alone, whereas the masters degrade their souls. Tom's sublimity lies in his power of forgiveness, his ability to love his enemies. His resignation is more admirable than Marie's because it is more knowing. Marie, despite her goodness, is pitiful. Marie dies asking for forgiveness—not of God, but of man—while Tom dies granting forgiveness. His death is redemptive, bringing freedom for both slaves and masters: first freedom of the soul and eventually freedom of the body as well.

The character of Marie illustrates the power of public opinion to ascribe and construct identity. Like Tocqueville, Beaumont suggests that women are more pliant (and more persecuted) creatures of public opinion than men. The situation of American women is almost the first subject discussed by Ludovic and the visiting Frenchman. The traveler begins by expressing his admiration for American girls and the custom of the love match—so different, he believes, from the corrupt practices of Europe: "Would it not be losing an opportunity for tranquil but delicious felicity not to seek the love of an American girl?"[14] Ludovic's disagreement with that fond wish prompts him to deliver a disquisition on "American Women" (the title of chapter 2). According to him, "[t]he country is dominated by a public opinion, from whose rule no woman can flee";[15] the effect is almost to alter woman's essential quality. In America, the female of the species has become reasonable, which is to say, cold, prudent, and moral, lacking imagination, sensibility, and tenderness. This "virile" character is the result of a system that extends liberty to women, but proscribes passion. Since young girls must make their own affectional choices, they must be educated early in the ways of the world: "The American girl needs knowledge to be chaste."[16] Along with self-reliance comes calculation; the business of American girls is husband-hunting. Together, purity and practicality leave little room for love. Ludovic declares that "[l]ove . . . is not understood in the United

[13] Id. at 44.
[14] Id. at 15.
[15] Id. at 22.
[16] Id. at 17.

States,"[17] a judgment he only slightly amends when he concludes (in true French fashion): "[p]erhaps they love in America; but they do not make love there."[18]

In the foreword to the novel, after declaring that "the opinions expressed by the characters are not always those of the author,"[19] Beaumont points the reader to the corrections contained in the appendices and footnotes. However, the note attached to Chapter 2 does not quarrel with Ludovic's presentation of American women so much as establish that, despite their deficiencies, the women of America are far superior to the men. According to Beaumont, women in America at least occupy a moral and intellectual realm—their concerns include education, culture, religion, and family. The male world, by contrast, is purely material: "The first sound in... [a boy's] ears is the chink of money; the first voice he hears is that of self-interest; he breathes at birth the air of industry."[20] If the liberty characteristic of this new regime has made women, to a certain extent, mannish, then the economic aspect of that liberty has made men brutish. Even the return to the family at day's end does not humanize the American male: "[h]e asks for his dinner, and offers not a word more."[21] So different are the respective spheres of men and women that Beaumont compares the marital relation to that between matter and mind, body and soul, stressing not the necessary union of such elements but their radical dissimilarity.[22]

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[17] Id. at 22.

[18] Id. at 22.

[19] Id. at 6.

[20] Id. at 216.

[21] Id. at 217. Tocqueville, like Beaumont, also speaks of the superiority of American women, indeed he says it is the main cause of "the singular prosperity and growing strength" of the nation. He similarly sketches the self-abnegation that marriage demands of American women (Tocqueville, at II.III.XII, 225). However, one must wonder how long such self-abnegation can last in a regime where self-interest prevails. Can Tocqueville's extravagant praise counter the tendency of the regime? Even as Tocqueville described women's unwillingness to contest marital authority and their acceptance of social and political inferiority, feminism was just around the corner—a phenomenon he either did not foresee or hoped to avert by his rhetoric.

[22] There were those, like Henry James, who worried about this division of roles. James, according to one commentator, lamented the increasing bifurcation of the sexes, in their interests and capacities, under the influence of capitalism. American men, he noted, had entirely abdicated 'society' for the sterile realm of business, leaving American women to create and inhabit the more cultivated institutions of American life. This very Tocquevillian division of labor had grown dangerous, in James's view, because without a 're-committal to masculine hands of some share at least in the interests of civilization,' men and women would end up being totally incompatible.Lauren Weiner, *Exporting the 'Self-Made Girl': The*

As Beaumont is careful to note in his foreword, there are exceptions to all his generalizations. The traveler reacts to Ludovic's portrait of the heartless American woman by mentioning those exceptions, particularly the women of other races: "If there are some whom the polar ice chills, others are warmed by the tropical sun."[23] This jars Ludovic and prompts him to tell the tragic story of one such exception—Marie. Marie possesses "Italian sensuousness and a French heart"[24] to complement her American mind, as evidenced by her true talent and taste for music, so unlike the robotic performances of most American girls. Yet she herself regards her superiority as a defect, even a sin. Echoing her father's denigration of her mother, she says: "Father, you are right. American women are superior to women of color; they are able to love with their reason; I know how to love only with my heart."[25]

Very different is the response of Marie's brother George to the revelation of their ancestry. Where Marie is ashamed, George is proud. He knows that he is inferior to no one. He longs for the vindication of the race to which he belongs. In one of his more passionate declarations, he says:

> It is true that according to law a Negro is not a man; he is a chattel, a thing. Yes, but you will see that he is a thinking thing, an acting thing, that can hold a dagger! Inferior race! So you say! You have measured the Negro brain and said 'There is no room in that narrow skull for anything but grief!' . . . . You are mistaken; your measurements were wrong; in that brutish head there is a compartment that contains a powerful faculty, that of revenge—an implacable vengeance, horrible but intelligent. . . . He grovels! Yes, for two centuries he has groveled at your feet—some day he will stand up and look you in the eye, and kill you.[26]

Although himself a free man, George understands that his condition is bound with that of the slaves. The imputation of inferiority which afflicts him will not disappear until the slaves themselves throw off their

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Comparative Politics of THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY, in Pamela Grande Jensen (ed.), FINDING A NEW FEMINISM: RETHINKING THE WOMAN QUESTION FOR LIBERAL DEMOCRACY 93-127, 102 (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996). The problem is not that it is "a man's world" but that American men are such narrow men.

[23] Beaumont, at 23. The talk of ice people and sun people is jarring to the modern reader, reminiscent as it is of the racialist theories of Leonard Jeffries and other purveyors of Afrocentrism.

[24] Id. at 41.

[25] Id. at 61.

[26] Id. at 60.

slavish state. George is an American of the Americans—he believes in the right of revolution.[27] Accordingly, while his sister slowly expires from grief and guilt, he joins in planning a joint rebellion of slaves and Indians. The Indians are to capture the city of Raleigh and defeat its militia, while the Negroes are to take the countryside, which is to say they are to assassinate the masters in their beds. Interestingly, Beaumont has George become the leader of the Indian contingent. In his acceptance speech, George says:

> My rightful place . . . is among the black men, but I am too proud of commanding such warriors as you to decline such an honor . . . . Moreover . . . although the vengeance my brothers will wreak, cruel as it may seem, is legitimate, I would prefer to avenge myself with the sword and not the dagger.[28]

At the hour fixed for the uprising, however, the slaves fail to act. George and the Indians, in a display of noble but impotent resistance, are slaughtered. The reason why the slaves do not act is unclear. According to the surviving Indian chief, disgusted by such faithlessness, it was either "stupidity or fear."[29] According to the governor of North Carolina, it was "prudence."[30] Another possibility is that the slaves shared George's scruples about "the dagger."

Given that Nat Turner's rebellion occurred in the year of Beaumont's visit, it is curious that he should present the slaves as so utterly passive. He seems to wish to deflect attention from the messy business of domestic revolt and "ennoble" the black man's struggle by assimilating the valorous George to the Indians. However, by creating such a gap between George and his slave brothers—through the exceptional quality of his actions, his attenuated connection to his ostensible race, and his identification with the Indians—Beaumont runs the risk that the reader's sympathy for George may not extend to the race as a whole. This is certainly the view of the Indian chief: in telling the story of the uprising, Mohawtan pretty clearly implies that those who accept slavery and do not attempt to free themselves deserve slavery. While Beaumont's own judgment is not as harsh, it would seem

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[27] The name "George" seems deliberately chosen to remind one of George Washington. According to Beaumont, he is the nation's only acknowledged hero: "To Washington alone are there busts, inscriptions, a column; this is because Washington, in America, is not a man but a god." Id. at 106; see also id. at 152.

[28] Id. at 164.

[29] Id.

[30] Id. at 165.

that, overall, he does share Tocqueville's assessment of the respective characters and fates of the Negro and Indian peoples. Tocqueville finds in the Negro a civil slavishness and in the Indian a barbarous independence—"The servility of the one dooms him to slavery, the pride of the other to death."[31]

As with Marie, George has a parallel in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, also named George, also proud and intelligent whose "appeals to heaven" are likewise more in the spirit of John Locke than Jesus. When told that the Bible commands submission to one's master, Stowe's George replies:

> "Don't quote Bible at me that way, Mr. Wilson, . . . don't! for my wife is a Christian, and I mean to be, if ever I get to where I can; but to quote Bible to a fellow in my circumstances, is enough to make him give it up altogether. I appeal to God Almighty; —I'm willing to go with the case to Him, and ask Him if I do wrong to seek my freedom.
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> Haven't I heard your Fourth-of-July speeches? Don't you tell us all, once a year, that governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed? Can't a fellow *think*, that hears such things? Can't he put this and that together, and see what it comes to?
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> I'll fight for my liberty to the last breath I breathe. You say your fathers did it; if it was right for them, it is right for me!" [32]

But once more, there is a crucial difference between the characters in the two novels. Stowe's George is less consumed by hatred. His pride directs him more toward liberty than vengeance. Beaumont's George, on the other hand, is almost as much a creature of white prejudice as Marie. His hatred, like her shame, entwines him with his oppressor. George never attains true independence.[33] Fittingly, "the son of Nelson"[34] (as the Indian chief calls him) dies in combat against the enemy of his family, Fernando d'Almanza, the man who had betrayed his mother's secret in New Orleans. D'Almanza had followed the family East, similarly "outing" George, first at the theater in New York, then

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[31] Tocqueville, at I.XVIII, 347.

[32] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin; Or, Life among the Lowly*, in THREE NOVELS: UNCLE TOM'S CABIN, OR, LIFE AMONG THE LOWLY; THE MINISTER'S WOOING; OLDTOWN FOLKS 1-519, at 134, 135, 137 (New York: Library Classics of the United States/Viking Press, 1982).

[33] It should be noted, however, that Stowe's George achieves his independence only by leaving America, an option that Beaumont's George rejects as cowardly.

[34] Beaumont, at 164.

at the ballot box in Baltimore (thereby accomplishing both his social and political exclusion).

Beaumont has conducted a thought experiment of sorts. He wanted to know the effects of prejudice on individuals who suffer from none of the more tangible after-effects of slavery—poverty, lack of education, disruption of family life, and so on. His answer does not give much ground for hope. These two quite superior individuals, Marie and George, are both destroyed. They take separate paths, but the result is the same. Resignation leads to slow death; rebellion to quick extermination. Beaumont very much shares the gloomy prognosis of Tocqueville and Jefferson about the possibility of interracial comity.[35]

The greatest black leaders have also been well aware of the difficulties, and of the danger of character deformation of precisely the two sorts Beaumont sketches—internalized hatred and externalized hatred. Black leaders have grappled with these temptations in their own lives and in most cases transcended them, hence their greater optimism in believing that prejudice need not govern the content of one's character. While concerned with improving material conditions, they have always sought to address, as well, the psychological conditions necessary for success. One might say that they have tried to move individuals from being Beaumont characters to being Stowe characters. They have sought to inspirit the downcast and moderate the flamethrowers, to transform the humility born of low self-esteem into a transcendent humility born of Christian forgiveness, and to transform the thirst for revenge into the impulse toward self-improvement. In the great rivalry between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois early in this century and in the later rivalry during the civil rights era between Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, each leader embodied one

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[35] According to Jefferson: "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate, than that these two people are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government." What was to prevent a successfully biracial society?

> Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; new provocations; the real distinctions which nature has made; and many other circumstances, will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of the one or the other race.

Notes on the State of Virginia, in Merrill D. Peterson (ed.), THE PORTABLE THOMAS JEFFERSON 23-232, at 186 (New York: Penguin, 1983). Tocqueville was equally grim: "Hitherto wherever the whites have been the most powerful, they have held the blacks in degradation or in slavery; wherever the Negroes have been strongest, they have destroyed the whites: this has been the only balance that has ever taken place between the two races." Tocqueville, at I.XVIII, 373.

attitude more than the other. Washington and King side more with love, DuBois and Malcolm X with pride.

The American Heart

As disturbing as the fate of Marie and George is the attitude of their father, Daniel Nelson. Here is a man ideally situated to overcome racial prejudice. He fell in love (albeit unknowingly) with a woman of mixed race and has mixed race children whom he loves, and yet he too, reluctantly, shares in the opinion of Negro inferiority. He tells his son "My boy, . . . do you believe that my heart has not bled in judging as I have the race to which your mother was related?"[36] George angrily responds that his father was an American before he was a husband—in other words, love has not been able to triumph over American prejudice. Although Nelson speaks against slavery, he also stresses the mildness of American slavery, and does nothing to hasten its demise. His inaction is not caused by an aversion to political advocacy. He is very active on behalf of the Indians, and inspired by religious zeal, works to alleviate the poor conditions in which they live. Toward the tragedy of his own family, however, he is oddly detached. Nelson personifies the deficiency of the American heart.

Throughout the novel, the contrast of head and heart is prominent, particularly in the middle section where Ludovic, during his time of testing, conceives a project for enlightening public opinion and rehabilitating the image of the Negro via literature and art. He is soon disillusioned, for as he explains to his French compatriot: "I would have had to rely upon poetry, the fine arts, upon imagination and enthusiasm; as though these had any power over a practical, commercial, industrial people!"[37] The spirit of the American nation, in Ludovic's view, is profoundly anti-poetic.

In light of Ludovic's experience, we might wonder what success Beaumont expected from his novel. Was he writing only for a French audience? The foreword suggests that he at least hoped for an English translation of his work, for it contains a passage addressed to the potential American reader. And yet, if the expose of American materialism (delivered in the series of epigrams that make up Chapter 12) is accurate, what effect could *Marie*—or any novel—have? Beaumont comments on the inability of Americans to appreciate either James Fenimore Cooper or Chateaubriand, two poets of the American wilder-

[36] Beaumont, at 61.
[37] Id. at 95.

ness whom "old Europe alone has understood."[38] Perhaps Beaumont's mongrel production, laden with appendices and charts, was specially designed to appeal to the austerity of the American temper. In the foreword to the novel, Beaumont deprecates the work's novelistic element and stresses its "seriousness." He begins by assuring the reader that "all but the form is serious" and that the "chief aim has been to present a succession of serious observations."[39] He goes on to appeal to (or flatter) the serious reader:

> This is the place in which to inform the *serious* portion of the public I am addressing that at the end of each volume will be found, under the heading of appendices and notes, a considerable quantity of material treated *seriously*, not only in matter but also in manner.[40]

Instead of cloaking preachments in the pleasing guise of poetry, Beaumont does the opposite. He administers the poetry in small doses, since soul-stretching is painful for such narrow (i.e. "serious") individuals.

One such dose is the "Episode of Onéda." Just after Ludovic tells the traveler that his grand plan to awaken sympathy for the oppressed blacks via art and poetry was unworkable, but before he elaborates on the peculiarities of the American character that made the plan impossible, the conversation of the two men is interrupted. At the very moment Ludovic says "I must open your eyes,"[41] their attention is drawn to a scene transpiring in the wilderness about them. A group of Indian women are mourning the loss of another tragic woman: Onéda. We learn that despite the practice of polygamy among the Ottawa tribe, the love of Onéda and Mantéo was exclusive. After the passage of several blissful years, however, Mantéo was prevailed upon (by the mothers of the tribe) to take a second wife. Onéda kills herself rather than see her beloved betray her by following such a custom. The witnesses to her death (a plunge from the cliffs) are moved—Beaumont is flat-footed enough to write "pity and terror filled every soul"[42]—and we get a glimpse of how

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[38] Id. at 116. Cooper at one point in his career shifted from novel writing to expository prose, when he felt his message needed more direct expression in order to penetrate to American ears. Catherine H. Zuckert, NATURAL RIGHT AND THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN AMERICAN FORM 39 (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990).

[39] Beaumont, at 3.

[40] Id. at 6.

[41] Id. at 95.

[42] Id. at 97.

mores might be changed via tragedy, if that tragedy can somehow be brought home to the viewer.

Repeatedly in the novel, Beaumont associates blacks, women, and Indians with the voice of the heart, a voice to which Americans are largely deaf. For Beaumont, the clearest example of this is the position of the mulatto in the United States. Persons of mixed ancestry ought to be a natural bridge between the races, but in the United States they are not. Tocqueville also, in his final chapter, entitled "The Present and Probable Future Condition of the Three Races that Inhabit the Territory of the United States," deals extensively with the question of racial amalgamation. He notes that "mulattoes are the true means of transition between the white and the Negro; so that wherever mulattoes abound, the intermixture of the two races is not impossible."[43] He goes on to point out, however, that "[m]ulattoes are by no means numerous in the United States; they have no force peculiar to themselves."[44]

In his foreword to the novel, Beaumont describes the incident which seems to have supplied the kernel of inspiration for *Marie*:

> The first time I attended a theater in the United States, I was surprised at the careful distinction made between the white spectators and those whose faces were black. In the first balcony were whites; in the second, mulattoes; in the third, Negroes. An American, beside whom I was sitting, informed me that the dignity of white blood demanded these classifications. However, my eyes being drawn to the balcony where sat the mulattoes, I perceived a young woman of dazzling beauty, whose complexion, of perfect whiteness, proclaimed the purest European blood. Entering into all the prejudices of my neighbor, I asked him how a woman of English origin could be so lacking in shame as to seat herself among the Africans.
> "That women," he replied, "is colored."
> "What? Colored? She is whiter than a lily!"
>
> "She is colored," he repeated coldly; "local tradition has established her ancestry, and everyone knows that she had a mulatto among her forebears."
>
> He pronounced these words without further explanation, as one who states a fact which needs only be voiced to be understood.
>
> At the same moment I made out in the balcony for whites a face which was very dark. I asked for an explanation of this new phenomenon; the American answered:
>
> "The lady who has attracted your attention is white."
>
> "What? White! She is the same color as the mulattoes."

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[43] Tocqueville, at I.XVIII, 389.
[44] Id.

> "She is white," he replied; "local tradition affirms that the blood which flows in her veins is Spanish."[45]

The despotism of opinion is such that Americans can see color where there is none, and not see color where it exists. What is fascinating to Beaumont is that even when color has been bleached through a long sequence of intermarriages, American prejudice is not lessened one jot. Americans insist, against the very evidence of their senses, that race is a permanent category, that color and the inferiority they believe that implies are immutable. Why such rigor?

It seems that the rigorous definition of "black" is perversely connected with American notions of liberty and equality. The Declaration of Independence asserts the universality of equal rights, and at the time of the founding it was widely understood that that declaration entailed a condemnation of slavery. In later years however, as the intransigence of the South increased, arguments began to be heard of the positive good of slavery. The new Southern justification of slavery denied the humanity of blacks, thus reading them out of the Declaration. Here the mulatto was a most inconvenient fact.[46] Slaveholders, in order to maintain the institution of slavery, had to turn a blind eye and countenance the enslavement of their own biracial offspring. For slaveholders to admit the fluidity of racial categories would call into question the justice of slavery.

For Northerners, what was at issue was not the humanity of blacks, but relative superiority and inferiority. When Ludovic questions Marie's father as to the origins of American race-prejudice, he responds by saying, "The black race is despised in America because it is a race of slaves."[47] Priding themselves on their own fight for freedom, white Americans revile those who have succumbed to slavery. Moreover, they come to identify liberty as the prerogative of white skin. Pride in liberty is distorted into race pride. As George explains to Ludovic, "A white skin is a mark of nobility."[48] Ludovic concludes that while the Americans have seen through aristocratic pretensions like "the transmission of

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[45] Beaumont, at 4-5.

[46] A word on etymology: "mulatto" comes from the Spanish word for mule. A mule is the sterile hybrid produced from the mating of a horse and an ass. Horses and asses are of the same genus, but diifferent species, hence the inability of their offspring, the mule, to reproduce itself. Mulattoes, however, are not like mules. The fact of fertile mixed race offspring is the proof, if proof is needed, of the humanity, the species sameness, of blacks and whites.

[47] Id. at 58.

[48] Id. at 62.

honors by blood," they have established a new nobility on a negative basis, namely, "the inherited infamy" of slavery.[49]

As Tocqueville points out in discussing the differences between ancient and modern slavery, the racial basis of modern slavery means that even after emancipation the former slave and his descendants bear an enduring mark of their past degradation. The freedmen still belong identifiably to the race of slaves, and that allows for mistreatment to continue under the guises of second-class citizenship, segregation, and exclusion from professions. After saying that "The black race is despised in America because it is a race of slaves," Daniel Nelson goes on to add: "it is hated because it aspires to liberty."[50] That aspiration is expressed more among the freedmen in the North than among the slaves and, as a result, Northern racism is more virulent. Because there was no barrier in law to the social and political equality of blacks, public opinion alone upheld the separation of the races and the disfranchisement of the freedmen. Accordingly, public opinion was all the more assiduous in discerning traces of "hereditary ignominy." To ward off amalgamation, those who might successfully amalgamate had to be discovered and made to share in all the afflictions of the disadvantaged race.

E Pluribus Unum

Neither Beaumont nor Tocqueville foresaw improvement in this racial dynamic. As Tocqueville sketches it, Americans are in a bind, for the three main alternatives—exodus, amalgamation, or living together as distinct races—are impossible. As to a separate but equal scenario, Tocqueville says: "I do not believe that the white and black races will ever live in any country upon an equal footing."[51] If the races remain distinct and equality is not achieved, Tocqueville predicts race war culminating "perhaps in the extirpation of one or the other of the two races."[52] Accordingly, he concludes that "the Negroes and the whites must either wholly part or wholly mingle."[53] Yet if prejudice is such that separate but equal is not a possibility, it would seem to rule out amalgamation as well. And indeed, Tocqueville notes that "the prejudice which repels the Negroes seems to increase in proportion as they are emancipated."[54] Tocqueville is equally gloomy about the prospect of

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[49] Id. at 63.
[50] Id. at 58.
[51] Tocqueville, at I.XVIII, 388-89.
[52] Id. at I.XVIII, 394.
[53] Id. at I.XVIII, 388.
[54] Id. at I.XVIII, 374.

exodus, at least in the form of a return to Africa. He is left, despite his anti-slavery sentiment, basically telling the Southerners to persist with slavery. "God forbid that I should seek to justify the principle of Negro slavery, as has been done by some American writers! I say only that all the countries which formerly adopted that execrable principle are not equally able to abandon it at the present time."[55]

While Tocqueville did not believe that the prospect of racial equality was likely anywhere in the world, he thought it especially unlikely in the United States. As he explains:

> I do not believe that the white and black races will ever live in any country upon an equal footing. But I believe the difficulty to be still greater in the United States than elsewhere. An isolated individual may surmount the prejudices of religion, of his country, or of his race; and if this individual is a king, he may effect surprising changes in society; but a whole people cannot rise, as it were, above itself.[56]

For Tocqueville, and especially for Beaumont, the problem was that a democracy could not "rise above itself." But the two Frenchmen may have overstated the difficulty. The nation need not "rise above itself." Rather, as Frederick Douglass put it, it need only "rise to the dignity of its professions"[57]—a different and more attainable goal. Social reformers and statesmen from Douglass and Lincoln forward have appealed to pride of a better sort to vanquish pride of a worse sort. Indeed, the fanatical patriotism which Beaumont attributes to the Americans was instrumental in this endeavor. White Americans were brought to realize that their proper pride lay in dedication to an idea, rather than in their being of white extraction. If we as a nation are dedicated to the truth of the Declaration's proposition, then the dignity of American blood requires behavior quite different than rigorous exclusion of any and all individuals of African descent. Perhaps it is not surprising that neither Beaumont nor Tocqueville saw this as a possible avenue.[58] It certainly was not much in evidence on the American scene of the early 1830s. Lincoln was still a generation away and the civil rights struggle which sought to complete his work was more than a century in the future.

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[55] Id. at I.XVIII, 394.

[56] Id. at I.XVIII, 388-89.

[57] Frederick Douglass, *The Nation's Problem*, in Howard Brotz (ed.), AFRICAN-AMERICAN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT, 1850-1920, 311-328, at 314 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 1992).

[58] Perhaps contributing to their oversight is their neglect of the Declaration of Independence.

Nonetheless, there were those, even at the time, who had more confidence in bettered race relations, and even looked forward to a radically assimilationist future. John Quincy Adams, in his diaries, predicts a new third race as a real possibility.[59] Frederick Douglass also believed that race was a transient quality. Throughout his long career, Douglass strove to make the American state, and American society, neutral to the difference between black skin and white. Douglass understood that the logical outcome of such neutrality would be racial amalgamation, the slow commingling of the races following the dictates of affection freed from the prejudice of color. A truly color-blind society would eventually become colorless—the original races would be absorbed in a third race, a mixed race, what he called a "composite American nationality." By the way, Douglass himself was a paragon of compositeness—part black, part white, part Indian—a blending of America's three races.

One recent indication that we may actually be headed in this direction is the advent of new terms of self-designation: biracial and multiracial. There are a growing number of people who wish to claim all aspects of their racial heritage. As the product of loving marriages, they don't wish to forswear either mother or father. There are now magazines and organizations of all sorts catering to this emerging segment of the population.[60] Also of note is the increased visibility of white men and black women together. During slavery, almost all miscegenation was between white masters and black slave women. Post-slavery, the great majority of mixed marriages have been between black men and white women, an alliance less tainted by the remembrance of slavery. If white men and black women are now more comfortable together, it suggests perhaps that the nightmare of the sexual exploitation of slave women haunts us less than in the past.

There have been other American thinkers, both black and white, who believed that the solution to America's racial dilemma need not take place on the level of the body.[61] W.E.B. DuBois was prominent among

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[59] John Quincy Adams, diary entry of 24 February 1820.

[60] In the summer of 1996, thousands of mixed race Americans gathered in Washington to celebrate, march in the Multiracial Solidarity March, and demand the addition of a multiracial category on the next census. *New York Times*, 20 July 1996, A1.

[61] There is the famous passage from Lincoln, where he responds to the charge made by his opponents that because he is anti-slavery he must also be in favor of racial amalgamation:

> Now I protest against that counterfeit logic which concludes that, because I do not want a black woman for a *slave* I must necessarily want her for a *wife*. I need not have her for either, I can just leave her alone. In some respects she certainly is not

those who argued vigorously against racial amalgamation. In his essay, "The Conservation of Races," DuBois asks:

> Have we in America a distinct mission as a race—a distinct sphere of action and an opportunity for race development, or is self-obliteration the highest end to which Negro blood dare aspire?[62]

In place of the radical individualism of Frederick Douglass, what DuBois envisioned was racial distinctness within a larger context of racial accord. America, DuBois thought, might be both heterogeneous and whole. While DuBois insists upon the conservation of the race, and on the need for complexional institutions (black colleges, newspapers, churches, and so on), he was not a separatist. The mission he had in mind was to make a distinctive contribution to the common culture. We might say that what he celebrates and anticipates is a sort of spiritual miscegenation, as when he predicts that the Negro message is "destined to soften the whiteness of the Teutonic to-day."[63] DuBois writes more beautifully than anyone I know of the character of the African-American contribution—witness this passage from his essay "The Sorrow Songs."

> Your country? How came it yours? Before the Pilgrims landed we were here. Here we have brought our three gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song—song, stirring melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land; the gift of sweat and brawn to beat back the wilderness, conquer the soil, and lay the foundations of this vast economic empire two hundred years earlier than your weak hands could have done it; the third, a gift of the Spirit. Around us the history of the land has centred for thrice a hundred years; out of the nation's heart we have called all that was best to throttle and subdue all that was worst; fire and blood, prayer and sacrifice, have billowed over this people, and they have found peace only in the altars of the God of Right. Nor has our gift of the Spirit been merely passive. Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation,—we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth,

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my equal; but in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands without asking leave of any one else, she is my equal, and the equal of all others. Abraham Lincoln, *Speech on the Dred Scott Decision*, in Richard N. Current (ed.), THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN 84-93, at 88 (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

[62] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Conservation of Races*, in W.E.B. DUBOIS: WRITINGS 815-826, 821 (New York: Library of America, 1986)(hereinafter W.E.B. DuBois).

[63] Id. at 822.

> lest the nation be smitten with a curse. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Are not these gifts worth the giving? Is not this work and striving? Would America have been America without her Negro people?[64]

Ralph Ellison in a 1970 essay entitled "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks," confirms DuBois's words. Ellison argues that "most American whites are culturally part Negro American without even realizing it."[65] So whether we speak in terms of the body or the spirit, we would have to say that the American world is white no longer. The poetry for which Beaumont longed—a poetry capable of melting what he called "that icy heart of American society"[66]—was produced out of America's racial dilemma itself, and by its chief sufferers.

American authors and orators, with African-Americans prominent among them, succeeded where Beaumont failed. In Beaumont's work—a novel with footnotes attached—the elements of head and heart remained distinct, insufficiently amalgamated or integrated. By contrast, in the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Luther King, we encounter appeals to political principle with the cadence of poetry. Meanwhile, those whose primary form is poetic (novelists like James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, or Toni Morrison) imbue their works with the rhythms and fire of political oratory, often informed by reflections on political theory and practice. The American temper does respond to genres that are truly mongrel productions. The composite of literature and politics is an American specialty.

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[64] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in *id.*, 357-547, at 545.

[65] Ralph Ellison, GOING TO THE TERRITORY 108 (New York: Vintage Books, 1987) (1986).

[66] Beaumont, at 114.