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Pardis Dabashi

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Cosmopolitan Secrets: The Racialist Affordances of Equivocation in Henry James's *The American*

Pardis Dabashi

Christopher Newman, the American businessman from Henry James's *The American*, encounters a friend from home soon after he strolls into the Louvre at the opening of the novel: "It must be eight or nine since we met" (47), Mr. Tristram tells him. It was "during the war," Newman responds. While Newman tries to recall the details of their last meeting, Tristram insists that he was never in the military at all. "But *you* were," he tells Newman (emphasis added). We learn that Newman served in St. Louis during the Civil War, which ended just three years before this chance meeting in Paris. "I came out with my legs and arms," Newman says, "and with satisfaction." Critics assume that when Newman "enters the Louvre," he "enters Europe" (Tintner 57). Accordingly, scholarship on James's South almost exclusively analyzes *The Bostonians* and *The American Scene*, where James explicitly and extensively invokes the South.¹ However, in this essay I build on the work that Sara Blair, Kenneth Warren, and Jessica Berman have done to divulge the domestic uses to which James put his cosmopolitanism. I demonstrate that his so-called international theme—what William Dean Howells and Leon Edel refer to as his interest in the

American experience of Europe during his early career—reinforces, in a transnational context, his contemplation of postbellum American national identity. *The American* was published serially in the *Atlantic Monthly* from 1876–77 but is set in 1868. While composing the novel, James corresponded regularly with friends and family about the 1876 American presidential election, whose results would shape political and economic relations between the North and the South after Reconstruction and beyond. James’s concern for the election has implications for how we read Newman’s eventual love interest, who comes from a family of Catholic Legitimists, an ultra-conservative branch of the French aristocracy who openly identified with the Southern planter class and supported Confederate efforts to secede. Haunting *The American*’s international theme is a suppressed history of the racial and economic conditions of national US modernity during Reconstruction. When Newman enters that edifice of imperial French cultural prestige, he is also entering a nexus of overlapping historical contexts that include post-Revolutionary France as well as James’s projection of the US South. That historical layering, I argue in this essay, has significant—and regrettable—implications for Jamesian cosmopolitanism, revealing but also repressing its internal contradictions.

According to Kwame Anthony Appiah, cosmopolitanism is a form of cognitive flexibility and ethical criticality that we develop when we are thrown (by force or by choice) into worlds foreign to us. In 2001, David Hollinger described a shift in critical emphasis from the study of the “old” cosmopolitanism based in a naively universalist humanism to that of the “new” cosmopolitanisms (1), which in their decided plurality, attend to the various “sociohistorical sites and situations of multiple membership” (Robbins and Horta 1). But while our conception of cosmopolitanism has expanded, what has remained a relative constant is this fundamentally Appiahian understanding of the cosmopolis as a space that demands and facilitates democratic ideals. A notable exception is Paulo Lemos Horta’s 2017 essay “Cosmopolitan Prejudice,” to which my title alludes. In his essay, Horta complicates the canonical account of cosmopolitanism by showing, through a close analysis of Appiah’s own objects of inquiry, that the very same cosmopolitan worldview that produces cognitive flexibility and ethical criticality can also generate unexpected forms of prejudice. Paying attention to cosmopolitanism’s contradictions is important for the study of James, given how committed scholars tend to remain to that older universalist ideal when considering his fiction as a critique of nationalist provincialism and essentialist

cultural allegiances. Indeed, apart from Berman's reappraisal of the cosmopolitanism of James's late fiction as founded on "national pressure" (36), scholarship on James's cosmopolitanism has largely remained estranged from scholarship on his racialism, no doubt because the two aspects of James's thought seem incompatible with one another.² I expand on Horta's and Berman's work in this essay to show how that incompatibility becomes evident in, and in fact plagues, *The American*—one of James's very first forays into what would eventually become his cosmopolitan oeuvre. The oblique intrusion of the antebellum Southern context into the French plot ultimately betrays the corruption of the cosmopolitan ideal by a national racism that James cannot renounce.

The South emerges in *The American* as a transregional entity that reflects both Northern national fantasies and traditions of European aristocracy. The South of *The American* thus validates Jennifer Rae Greeson's argument that far from "furnishing something so simple as a site of domestic regional variation for U.S. literature, our South"—the South as a functional fantasy generated by the American literary imagination rather than a political reality—"always points beyond national borders" (4). Rather than a "fixed" (1) or a "real place," she writes, the South is an "evolving construction" (2) that allows American writers to think through and produce narratives about the nation's relation to the rest of the world. It is a "fertile spatial nexus of the domestic and the foreign, marking . . . the continental and hemispheric horizon toward which U.S. imperial desire projects" (3).³ Drawing on Greeson's understanding of the South as a "conduit" (4) that connects the US to "what lies outside it" (3), I consider James's Europe as a porous fictive membrane from behind which the South—James's South, as the reflection of his political ideals and anxieties—makes itself visible. *The American* does not offer a comprehensive allegory of North/South relations. However, by observing a subterranean network of references to the crisis of American disunion, we can detect in the novel a suggestive palimpsest of geographies and histories that gesture toward James's ambivalence about the changing economic order, labor regimes, and racial implications in the US. While James critiques Southern aristocratic barbarism, he sympathizes with patrician fears that American industrialism and racial democracy threaten cultural decay.

But instead of arguing that James's national racial anxieties compromise his cosmopolitanism, this essay will show that *The American* makes evident that a certain form of cosmopolitanism can comfortably accommodate and in fact provide discursive shelter for

national racism often considered incompatible with that cosmopolitanism. Buried within *The American's* international terrain is an acknowledgement that any American aspiration to cosmopolitan extranationalism conducted along a European axis (which, for James, is the only legitimate one) will inevitably be compromised by the history of European colonialism and its political and economic affinities with the antebellum South. Cosmopolitanism, *The American* quietly concedes, must either extend its democratic impulse to those racialized subjects on whose labor Euro-American cultures of refinement are founded, or be partial and thus inherently self-negating. James's difficulty in coming to terms with this conundrum is evident, as we shall see, in the way the Southern context gets mediated through an aesthetics of secrecy and equivocation, which—so often understood in terms of queer James—in *The American* betrays the taintedness of the cosmopolitan ideal with national racism. That international displacement ultimately allows James to leave his own racial anxieties uninterrogated and the contradictions of his cosmopolitanism unresolved. For it is precisely because the discursive terrain of *The American* is composed of multiply mediated cultural codes that James's racialism is able still to thrive.

Though James was “observing firsthand” the Parisian politics that surrounded him while writing *The American* (Rowe, “The Politics of Innocence” 86)—especially the conflict between the fallen aristocracy and the republicans who supported the French Revolution of 1848—he remained highly interested in American politics. In March 1877, the month of the last installment of *The American* in the *Atlantic*, James wrote to his mother, “I say nothing of Hayes, but think much. I hope under him the land will revive. Do send me his portrait” (*Complete Letters Vol. 3* 79). In what James referred to in a letter to his sister in December 1876 as “the dreadfully mixed matter of Tilden and Hayes” (5), the 1876 election results between Democrat Samuel J. Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes were so disputed that the two parties had to reach a mutual agreement. Leading up to the Bargain of 1877, Eric Foner explains, Northern Republicans let Southern Democrats believe that, in exchange for support for Hayes, they would appoint a Southerner to the Republican cabinet and lend financial aid to Southern railroad construction. This strategy took advantage of the South's postbellum economic needs and political vulnerability, establishing Northern Republican rule at a national level. Foner explains further that, though resentful of the encroachment of progressive mores and of having to depend on Northern industry to rescue it from immiseration, the South complied, as the depres-

sion of the 1870s had worsened their already suffering economy. The Compromise formally ended Reconstruction, re-establishing home rule in the Southern states and announcing the imperative of industrialization in the South. James repeatedly conversed with friends and family about the Hayes-Tilden affair while he was living in Europe, asking his sister, for instance, to "Write me all about it" (*Complete Letters Vol. 1* 5) or telling Howells, in a letter describing the plot of *The American*, that he was pleased to hear about "the promise of Hayes" (*Complete Letters Vol. 3* 209).

The Hayes-Tilden Compromise had much in common with the French political scene that was unfolding as James was composing *The American*. The Bellegardes, Newman learns, are Catholic Legitimists and Ultramontanes, an extremely conservative faction of the French nobility. The establishment of the Republic in 1830 by the anti-clerical and liberal July, or Orléans, monarchy socially and politically displaced the Legitimists. When Claire's icy older brother, Urbain, tells Newman that "he had but a single political conviction, which was . . . [that] he believed in the divine right of Henry of Bourbon, Fifth of his name, to the throne of France" (228), he is signaling that despite the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy, he and his family remain faithful to pre-Revolutionary ideals. Legitimists "remained stubbornly opposed," John Carlos Rowe writes, "to any reconciliation with republican or liberal politics" ("The Politics of Innocence" 79). Though nobility like the Bellegardes maintained social prestige and local influence, Louis Philippe I's rise to power after the 1830 Revolution symbolized the repudiation of the aristocracy's political and social supremacy. Increased industrialization and commercialization under the July monarchy made the social mobility of the *petite bourgeoisie* and the working class an urgent threat in the minds of the Bellegardes' caste.

Largely making their income from landownership and small-scale agricultural production dependent on peasant labor, nineteenth-century French nobles like the Bellegardes preferred to avoid commercial investment opportunities. They saw these investments as imperiling aristocratic distinction. Recall, for instance, that the Bellegardes are displeased to hear of Newman's investments in washtubs, copper, rubber, and railroads. And though the Second Republic (turned Second Empire) grew to be as authoritarian as the Orléans monarchy eventually became, it was propelled by a republican ideology of liberty and equality. Furthermore, the new government abolished slavery, which, prior to the Haitian Revolution, had made Haiti the world's most lucrative colony. Though banned in

1818, the French slave trade continued as an illegal practice and “was at a peak between 1820 and 1829” (Yee 57), the nine years leading up to the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy. By the time Newman arrives in Paris in 1868, then, the Bellegardes have lived decades in which their sociopolitical pre-eminence, their patrician valuation of inherited distinction, and their nation’s slave-labor regime had come under threat. They represent a community of French nobility fearful of the nation’s movement toward modes of industrial production embodied in businessmen rising to prominence in a republic no longer deriving a significant portion of its wealth from slave labor. Although he is not a Frenchman, Newman is a self-made republican manufacturer, thus symbolizing the Western economic modernity that helped supplant families like the Bellegardes.

James might plausibly have “[thought] much” (*Complete Letters Vol. 3* 79) of the US political climate while composing *The American*, considering the Old South had undergone a social and cultural upheaval similar to the one in France, though in a more concentrated period of time and with more acute economic consequences for the elite. After the Confederacy lost to the North in 1865, the cotton plantation economy founded on the profitability and social distinction of landownership collapsed, leaving an aristocratic culture in ruin. Confronting the Old South was a victorious republican North, powered by an industrial, free-labor, free-market economy. The South became the nation’s internal political and cultural “other” (Greeson 3), having to accept defeat by a united national republic whose aid meant a humiliating cultural compromise. Despite the South’s need for Northern financial aid, Northern victory produced in the South a “determination to preserve the integrity of their way of life” (Franklin 3), rather than a readiness to capitulate to Northern reformist attitudes. In France, as Roger Price explains, patrician chauvinism made it difficult for Legitimists to admit to the futility of their loyalty to the Bourbon monarchy; so, too, the South adhered to a Lost Cause mentality.

But the connections between the US South and France surpass mere historical parallelism. Not only did France have an extensive history of colonial settlement in Florida, Texas, and Louisiana, but it also was a key imperial power in the global cotton industry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Le Havre harbor, Sven Beckert argues, was the most important cotton port in continental Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century and many of its French traders established cotton export firms and agencies in Mobile, New Orleans, and Galveston. After the Haitian Revolution of

1791, however, French cotton production started to dwindle, Beckert explains, leaving room for the emergence of the US plantation economy. During the Civil War, French financier Frédéric Emile d'Erlanger issued a loan to the Confederacy that was mostly used for military equipment.⁴ And prior to their defeat, the South had a long tradition of exporting cotton to France. In fact, the “white cotton” (332) woven into the curtain hanging near Valentin’s death bed very plausibly represents a Confederate product. George M. Blackburn notes that though the import of raw Southern cotton to France significantly diminished during the war, driving up prices, causing a rise in French unemployment, and generating intense debate among the French about the desirability of Southern defeat, it never entirely stopped until the end of the conflict.

Moreover, Newman’s penchant for reading newspapers—they “form his principal reading” (437)—offers a window into the world of nineteenth-century French journalism, a cultural venue that helped solidify the ideological rapprochement of pro-Bourbon French nobility and Southern secessionists. A testament to the two nations’ long-intertwined political and economic histories, as well as just how readily the ideological differences internal to the war-torn US mirrored those of France’s political factions, French newspapers vigorously covered North/South relations during the Civil War. Depending on its political and ideological leanings, a newspaper would support either the North or the South. Blackburn comments that papers such as the *Siècle* and *l’Opinion nationale* supported the Union, while others, like *l’Union* and especially *Monde*, were organs of Legitimist and clerical pro-Southern sentiment. (Though we never learn the specific names of the newspapers Newman reads, we can at least assume that he would avoid *Monde*.) While it was “slavery rather than democracy,” Blackburn observes, “that received major emphasis in the columns of pro-Union journals” (182), pro-Confederate French newspapers attacked what they considered Northerners’ brutish materialism and speculation. The pro-Southern French press tended to make their point on “socioethnic” (184) grounds, arguing that “Northerners were descended from Roundheads, while Southerners were descended from Cavaliers; Northerners were Teutonic and Protestant, while Southerners were Latin and Catholic.” The 14 January 1862 issue of *Pays* even urged Frenchmen to recall that the South originated “for the most part from our former American possessions, keeping our customs, our ideas, our language and the religion of the common *patrie*.” The 28 May 1864 issue of *Monde* asserted that the war resulted from the antagonism between “races” (qtd. in Blackburn 185)—not

between black slaves and white slave-owners, but between Northern Anglo-Saxons and Southern planters whose gorgeous land Northerners wanted for themselves.

Contemptuous of American democracy, Legitimists thought that Northern victory would mean the demise of true liberty and prosperity in the US (which they associated with religiosity), and the rise of a “military despotism” (Blackburn 185), which they would have negatively associated with the Bonapartists of their own nation. Recall Madame de Bellegarde’s refusal to allow members of the modern military to attend the ball celebrating Claire’s engagement to Newman—“There were no uniforms, as Madame de Bellegarde’s door was inexorably closed against the myrmidons of the upstart power which then ruled the fortunes of France” (276–77). Her purposeful exclusion of the military (except, of course, for the Union veteran Newman) is symptomatic of the broader Legitimist disrespect for the martial power of republican democracies, which Legitimists saw, especially in this immediate postbellum era, as culturally impoverishing and ideologically threatening to both France and the US. As for the war itself, France had claimed neutrality early on, but ideological tensions grew as the cotton shortage put pressure on the French economy. Though it was in Europe’s economic interest that the South unite with the North as quickly as possible to maintain their cotton production and exportation practice, conservative France predictably continued to advocate for Southern independence. Legitimist Ultramontanes such as the Bellegardes, therefore, did not just virulently support the South, they also saw themselves in the South. They openly identified with the South’s sense of victimization and they shared their racially, economically, and culturally informed suspicion of republican democracy.

The American reflects this continuity between the Legitimist and Old Southern confrontation with republican modernity, as the national gamble of reconciliation in the postbellum US—the economic, political, and cultural barter by which the empowered North sought to consolidate its power at a moment of national modernity—inflects the terms of the marriage bargain between Newman and the Bellegardes. Newman arrives in Paris when US imperial design had, as Gresson explains, turned geographically outward and the newly reunified nation sought geopolitical parity with Old World empire. The Bellegarde family’s conservatism and refinement make them a prime target for Newman’s attempt to consecrate his New World industrial wealth. With money made from manufacturing businesses and railroad investments in the US, Newman is ready to “rest awhile,

to forget the confounded thing . . . to see the world, to have a good time, to improve my mind, and . . . to marry a wife" (51). His expatriate friend Lizzie Tristram introduces him to Claire de Cintré, who "belongs to the very top of the basket, as they say here. Her family, on each side, is of fabulous antiquity" (74). They are a European patrician ideal, "the skim of the milk of the *noblesse*" (74–75). Though their relationship begins as a classic Jamesian marriage bargain, the dynamics of US national reunion gradually begin to impose themselves onto it. Newman finds that the family from whom he could receive cultural and economic validation is reduced to a state that he had not expected. "They have an old hotel in the Rue de l'Université, but their fortune is small, and they make a common household, for economy's sake," Lizzie tells him (74).

Old Southern history drifts into the novel's historical landscape in the form of the Bellegardes' financial desperation. In post-1840s France, the threat the nobility faced from capitalist industry was predominantly cultural and social—the potential leveling of political influence and lifestyle across classes—rather than financial. Price specifies that the growing wealth of industrialists and financiers by 1870 decentered, but did not replace, aristocratic wealth. "At least until the 1870s," he writes, "investment in land," the favored source of income for nobles, "offered a secure income, and a decent return on the capital invested" (99). But fiscal recuperation is the Bellegardes' incentive for allowing the "glory" of their house to "pass into eclipse" (227) through union with an unrefined businessman. It was Southerners, not Legitimists, who possessed that mixture of economic need and resentment toward liberal, republican wealth embodied in Madame de Bellegarde. She both defensively insists that "I am content with what I have" (183) and confesses to Newman that "I am on my knees to money; I don't deny it. If you have it, I ask no questions. For that, I am a real democrat—like you, monsieur" (131). Another history encroaches on James's plot here, since the Legitimists were simply not poor enough to express, and nearly act on, this sort of desperation. Unlike the French nobility, whose money remained in landownership, the Southern aristocracy suffered acute financial devastation due to the war and the abolition of slave labor. The US Reconstruction James was tracking in his letters emerges in the Bellegarde's temporary willingness to accept help from Newman's Yankee, industrial wealth.

The rhetoric of Civil War and Reconstruction history, on open display in *The Bostonians*, appears more subtly in *The American's* language. For instance, James mentions the "epicure . . . hidden in every

man" (223) who waits for a "signal from some divine confederate that he may safely peep out" (255), describes Noémie Nioche's departure from her father's care as a "secession" (332), and specifies that the curtain hanging near Valentin's death bed is laced with "white cotton." However, the intrusion of the US historical framework into the novel's international theme becomes the most pronounced, and has the most significant aesthetic and political consequences for the novel's cosmopolitanism, in Newman's sense of responsibility to liberate Claire. The Bellegardes' peculiar family system that strips Claire of her agency starts to elicit from Newman responses he would have had to the slaveholding South, where patrician cultural refinement accompanied forms of violent subjugation. Newman tells Tristram that he fought in St. Louis during the Civil War and that he "came out . . . with satisfaction" (47). That Newman probably fought for the Union is intimated in a dispute he has with Tristram, who, resentful and disdainful of the postbellum US, makes what Newman takes to be inappropriate "allusions to their native country" (65). But despite Lewis O. Saum's suggestion that Newman's status as a Westerner is "far more salient than his martial involvement" (1), Newman's participation in the Union victory in fact determines his stance toward the oppressiveness of the Bellegarde household. While Missouri was divided on the issue of slavery, St. Louis "harbored abolitionist sentiments" (Foner 41). It also housed a sizable population of German immigrants, many of whom "identified Slave Power with the landed aristocracy of Europe" and, hence, vehemently supported the Unionists' "democratic revolution." On one occasion, Newman explodes at Tristram, telling him that the US was "the greatest country in the world . . . and that an American who spoke ill of them ought to be carried home in irons" (65). His invocation of "irons," which may evoke the institution of slavery, suggests that though he came out of the war "with satisfaction" (47), its political terms still linger in his memory. His instinct to cuff Tristram also evinces strains of what David Blight has explained were the more militant, "emancipationist" (79) postbellum politics that inspired many Republicans to view Confederates as traitors worthy of criminal sentences.

By the time Newman meets the Bellegardes, in other words, he is in a position to detect in the relationship between Claire and her family a form of subjugation within a paternalistic, agrarian order that projects dynamics of slavery onto the ownership of a daughter. This is a transference of political subjectivity across race and gender that, as Leland Person has shown, James explored more explicitly in *The Bostonians*. Person builds on Eric Sundquist's observation that

Frederick Douglass first identifies himself as a slave when, hiding in a closet, he observes his Aunt Hester being beaten by her master. Sundquist concludes from this that to be a slave means to be “inverted,” or “feminized” (Person 292). This mechanism of inversion and identification, Person claims, determines Basil Ransom’s ability to detect continuities between his status as a defeated and emasculated Southerner, and Verena Tarrant’s subjection to the mastery of her father. In *The American*, too, the figure of woman affords an inquiry into the political conditions of enslavement. Moreover, before Emancipation, the legal and social status of women and slaves overlapped significantly, since by law they were both considered dependents, and masters of the plantation “assumed economic, legal, and moral responsibility” for them (Edwards 6). Newman’s experiences as a Unionist have thus prepared him to see in Claire’s feminized weakness her subjugation to an aristocratic form that elevates masculine, racialized power.

The Bellegarde family’s treatment of Claire indeed resembles the conflation of domestic and private life in the slave regime, where dependents may have had relative freedom of movement in the “physical space” (Edwards 7) beyond the household, but were forbidden to claim the rights productive of the “independent public personas” afforded to white men. The “old feudal countess of a mother,” Madame de Bellegarde, for example, “rules the family with an iron hand” and “allows [Claire] to have no friends but of her own choosing” (76), thus enacting what Newman would associate with the Old South’s domestic instantiation of a political dynamic of ownership and subjugation. Tristram even jokes about Claire as “on her knees, with loosened tresses and streaming eyes, and the rest of [her family] standing over her with spikes and goads and red-hot irons” (121). And although marriage in elite French circles had long been treated as a vehicle for securing social status and political alliances, James chooses to characterize marriage in the Bellegardes’ milieu with the language of corporeal ownership rather than connection-building: Claire “had been sold once” (120) to her deceased, tyrannical first husband M. de Cintré, Lizzie tells Newman, so now she “naturally objects to being sold again.” Newman therefore meets Claire’s predicament with a diction of republican liberty leftover from the emancipatory discourses of the Civil War era. When Claire insists on remaining unmarried, Newman tells her, “If you are afraid of losing your freedom, I can assure you that this freedom here, this life you now lead, is a dreary bondage . . . Let me come in and put an end to it” (170). He vows that marriage to him will honor her right

“to be perfectly free” (172). Newman’s love for Claire bears traces of an emancipatory politics that he would have inherited from his abolitionist Unionism. He thus recreates with the Bellegardes the political and economic compromise enacted between the North and the defeated, impoverished South; Newman will financially revive them if, in exchange, he can instill his own republican politics by releasing their daughter from her “bondage” (170).

But Claire’s “bondage” to the Bellegardes is not just a thematic transposition of slavery in the US. It also gestures toward French colonialism itself. While the ever-present and terrified Bellegarde maid, Mrs. Bread, is the only laborer we see, James’s description of Valentin’s apartment invokes the far more hidden, geographically distant colonial slave labor the novel never explicitly mentions:

The place was low, dusky, contracted, and crowded with curious bric-à-brac. Bellegarde, penniless patrician as he was, was an insatiable collector, and his walls were covered with rusty arms and ancient panels and platters, his doorways draped in faded tapestries, his floors muffled in the skins of beasts . . . among the shadows, you could see nothing . . . Newman thought it a damp, gloomy place to live in, and was puzzled by the obstructive and fragmentary character of the furniture. (144)

Scholarship rightly emphasizes Newman’s voracious taste for collecting objects, lands, and even persons (an acquisitiveness to which I will return).⁵ But Valentin, too, is “an insatiable collector,” and in his chambers we see suggestively “obstructive” indications of French colonial conquest. The “curious bric-à-brac” adorning his home, and the “skins of beasts” especially, tell a quiet material history of the French colonial occupation of distant places—such as West Africa and Haiti—evoking, through their very reticence, the slave labor that, though formally illegalized, underpinned Bourbon monarchical prosperity from a distance. In his rhetorical indirection—indeed, the same “shadows” through which one “could see nothing” seem to obscure the colonial reference itself—James follows in the footsteps of his literary forebear Honoré de Balzac, in whose novels obliquity was often a device for pointing to slave labor in France’s colonies.

In fact, Balzac probably occupied James’s thoughts more than usual while he was composing *The American*. In 1875, just the year before its installments began appearing in the *Atlantic*, James had published an article on Balzac in *The Galaxy*. Though “money,” as he put it in the essay, “is the most general element of Balzac’s novels” (819), Balzac tended to eschew slavery. His “encyclopedic” novelistic

inventories of nineteenth-century French society were meant to “illustrate” the national “machinery” of France as it was transforming into an industrial-capitalist republic, but he remained indirect about slave labor. Jennifer Yee argues, however, that “in the case of slavery in the *Comédie humaine*,” its “oblique nature is not silence” (56). It is “concomitant with the situation of colonial issues offstage . . . The slave trade could in fact serve as emblematic of this present absence . . . Narrative distanciation echoes the effect of geographical distance.” By obliquely invoking slave labor, that is, Balzac mimics the remoteness of slavery from the French imperial center. Yee reads the theme and diction of sugar in Balzac’s work as allusive of its cultivation by slaves in the colonies, a rhetorical strategy of a piece with James’s reference to Valentin’s skins of beasts and bric-à-brac, the “curio[sity]” (144) of which suggests the Orientalizing gaze of the colonizing collector. Balzac was, moreover, well aware of the historical and material connections between France and the US South. In a key moment of his *Père Goriot*—whose famous boarding house the Maison Vauquer James later compared to the “dusky hotel of the Rive Gauche” in which he composed parts of *The American* (*Art of the Novel* 28)—the criminal Vautrin explicitly links monarchical France to the Southern slavocracy. “My plan is to go live the life of a patriarch on some vast estate,” he says, “a hundred thousand acres or so, in the United States, in the South. I want to be a planter, own slaves . . . while living like a king, doing as I please” (Balzac 100).⁶ As an “artistic disciple” of Balzac (Stowe xiv), James would have been familiar with his belief that monarchic institutions organized life in the absolute hierarchical terms shared with slave societies. A “bourgeois was a merchant or an artisan,” Balzac wrote in the preface to *Une Fille d’Eve* (1838), “a nobleman was entirely free, a peasant was a slave” (qtd. in Stowe 4).

Thus, in his characteristic innocence, Newman does not realize that by detecting the power dynamics of Southern slave society in the Bellegarde family, he is actually picking up on the continuities between antebellum Southern brutality and European colonialism. Through his very misrecognition of the Southern plantocracy in the French Legitimists, in other words, Newman highlights that the racialized violence underpinning the wealth and cultural refinement of the Southern gentry underpins, too, that of the French nobility. More provocative than that historical doubling, however, is what that doubling means for Jamesian cosmopolitanism. In revealing those historical and political continuities, Newman is unknowingly throwing into relief the fundamental contradiction on which James’s Euro-American cosmopolitanism is predicated.

For Appiah, cosmopolitanism entails “the recognition of our responsibility for every human being” (7), an ethical criticality facilitated if not enabled by geographical displacements that put the parochial particularities of our native locales into radical perspective. Because of the enormous impact that discourses of cosmopolitanism have had on James scholarship, we have grown accustomed to seeing his fiction as one among the first in the Anglo-American tradition to embody Appiahian cosmopolitan standards. Rowe has claimed, for instance, that “Henry James’s life and works anticipate Appiah’s cosmopolitan ideal . . . In James’s writings, moral value is based on the human capability to learn from cultural, social, and national differences” (“Henry James and the United States” 229). Rebecca L. Walkowitz, too, writes that “for James, the floating world was the condition to which fiction aspired” (111–12). The boundaries of the nation, as scholars from Rowe, Walkowitz, and Blair, to Berman and Anna Despotopoulou suggest, are precisely what James’s cosmopolites recognize as falsely binding. Through international travel, James’s cosmopolites awaken to the moral and cultural limitations of local affiliation. They develop, instead, a consciousness that hovers above national particularities, a capacity to navigate cultural differences by gliding across their multiple and mobile “surfaces” (Despotopoulou 141). *The Portrait of a Lady*’s Ralph Touchett is perhaps a quintessential model, as is *The American*’s Lizzie Tristram. There are, of course, those who fail and instead exhibit a lack of intellectual and cultural dexterity, re-entrenching themselves in national affiliation and even local prejudice. As Despotopoulou notes, for instance, *The Portrait of a Lady*’s Caspar Goodwood is “unable to let go of allegiances and mentalities derived from what are considered ‘natural’ ties with a particular national culture, retain[ing] a more exclusionary stance, rejecting the ideal of cosmopolitan fusion” (142). Newman’s failure to fuse with European culture is arguably even more glaring than Goodwood’s, his gaucheness more imposing. His tendency to stretch his legs in public or formal places (such as the Louvre and the Bellegarde home), and his generalized social vulgarity at the Bellegarde ball (“it was that, I think, that broke me down,” the matriarch confesses [319]) index an especial, if comic, cultural tone-deafness.

But *The American* presents us with the question of whether such instances of cultural ricochet are in fact failures or simply moments when the internal contradictions of Jamesian cosmopolitanism are threatening to be exposed. More specifically, *The American* asks who it would take to expose those contradictions. Newman, a Union veteran, is thrown back onto his most national, if regional, affiliations when he

confronts the intimacy of European colonial brutality with the vilest of his own nation's politics. Instead of developing a cosmopolitan, extranational sensibility, Newman is overwhelmed by his most local allegiances overwhelm him in Paris; so, in this narrow sense, he is a failed cosmopolitan. But, by recognizing in the French nobility the Southern plantocracy's abject failure to respect "our responsibility for every human being" (Appiah 7), Newman unknowingly reveals that any cosmopolitan project conducted along a Euro-American axis must either extend its aims to those on whose backs aristocratic wealth and refinement (be they Southern or French) are built, or ignore that racialized brutality and exploitation of human life and labor. Cosmopolitanism must either be partial and thus self-negating, or total. Perhaps it takes a Unionist in Paris to expose this dilemma.

The indirection, if not murkiness, of the Southern material in *The American's* French plot bespeaks James's inability to brook that total cosmopolitanism and, thus, the irresolution of that dilemma. Indeed, despite how vocal he was about the fate of the unifying nation in his epistolary exchanges, how closely Southern aristocratic history mirrored that of the post-Revolutionary French nobility, and how intimately Legitimist Catholics identified with and supported the Southern planter class, there's an indisputable obliqueness to the Civil War history and its racial politics of subjugation in *The American*. The novel seems to refer to its own acts of historical burial through the theme of secrecy—the wicked secrets of the Bellegarde family, Newman's conflict over whether to sound them or not, and Newman's own mysterious background prior to arriving in Paris.⁷ The novel's technique of evasion is so prevalent, in fact, that Lee Clark Mitchell has suggested its effect to be "of a virtual novel that lies behind the one we read" (12). We might ask, however, what that indirection affords James, given what we know about his complicated racial attitudes. If he were to acknowledge the Southern connection more openly, he would have to acknowledge, too, the contradictions of the cosmopolitanism he was in the midst of forging in his fiction. The obliqueness of the Southern material in *The American's* French plot allows James to leave that dilemma of a total-versus-partial cosmopolitanism unresolved. That suppression, as I will examine, allows James to maintain a political duality: to denounce the barbarisms of black bondage while still claiming solidarity with patrician values of cultural distinction and privacy.

Ever since Toni Morrison's indictment that even a comprehensive reading of James scholarship would not unearth a serious reckoning with "the black woman who . . . becomes the agency of moral

choice and meaning in *What Maisie Knew* (13), critics have been parsing James's complex and often contradictory racial attitudes. For our purposes, the most notable among these contributors are Warren and Blair, who, respectively, reveal the complicity of Jamesian realism with pro-Jim Crow ideology, and reconceive James as a critic of the growing instability of American racial identity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ Both Warren and Blair reveal the unevenness of James's positions on racial equality, as well as how his valuation of individual freedom often conflicts with his demand for "certain necessary and desirable limits" (Warren 18) both in aesthetics and sociopolitical relations.

During the Civil War, James's family was invested, albeit inconsistently, in abolitionist views. His brothers Wilkinson and Robertson fought in the Union Army, his father spoke publicly against the institution of slavery, and Henry attended a meeting at the Boston Music Hall in 1863 "to celebrate the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation" (Taylor 9).⁹ "James's sentiments were smugly, if quietly abolitionist," Warren writes (19). James states in *Notes of a Son and Brother* that "our sympathies, our own as a family, were, in the current phrase, all enlisted on behalf of the race that had sat in bondage" (290). James's depiction of the Bellegardes—a "penniless" (131) gentry unwilling to yield to the liberal ideals of a new political order by releasing their disenfranchised daughter—should be read against this ideological backdrop. *The American's* patent sympathies with Newman's plans to remove Claire from the destructive clutches of the Bellegardes, informed by his republican democratic valuation of individual freedom, seem to evince a critique of the absolute hierarchy of both pre-revolutionary France and Old Southern slave society.

James wrote *The American* not long before what Nina Silber calls the "reunion culture" (4) of the 1880s and 1890s, when Northern writers, nervous about the decline of Victorian standards for gender relations, were producing literature that romanticized Old Southern codes of gendered behavior the North was afraid it had lost. Writers were imagining "metaphors and cultural images of reconciliation" (2) that often turned on a "symbolic marital alliance" (6) that had become "the principal representation of sectional reunion." During that period, Northern writers were prepared to disregard facets of Old Southern political and social culture they once deemed reprehensible, since the romanticized Old South allowed them to indulge the fantasy of restoring traditional gender relations to Northern culture through a union with a Southern belle. (Silber regards *The Bostonians* as James's inverted romance of reunion.) But *The American* was writ-

ten at a time when Northern writers were more critical of Southern institutions, closer as the novel was to the Civil War itself, when the future of the nation was more uncertain, and when the political fate of black slaves, as James wrote in *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), was "intensely in the air" (*Autobiography* 143). Eric Haralson argues in "The Person Sitting in Darkness" that James tends to over-identify with the white South, exonerating it in such a way that forecloses acknowledgement of the terrors of black bondage. Although *The Bostonians* and *The American Scene* validate Haralson's point, in this earlier historical moment, James's politics were more influenced by the abolitionist sentiment of his day and his own family.

But James hits his limit, as Blair and Warren note, when it comes to the social and aesthetic consequences of black enfranchisement. Despite his quiet investment in abolitionist views, "freedom" for James, Blair notes, was "the definitive value" of the "Anglo-Saxon 'race', achieving its highest expression in the exquisite self-stagings of a self-consciously Anglo-American character" (62). Warren shows that racial politics in James's work finds its corollary in the aesthetic domain while Blair demonstrates that American racial anxieties shape the contours of cultural exchange in his fiction. James's famed lamentation for the decay of critique—the acumen to perceive difference—was not divorced from what he perceived as the infiltration of the public sphere by African Americans. The post-emancipation legal domain saw the passing of the 1875 Civil Rights Act, which permitted access to all "accommodations . . . and other places of public amusement" across racial lines (qtd. in Warren 34–35). For James, Warren notes, "to see American democracy as even slightly palatable, one must see it as homogeneous" (37). The ability to critique, in James's fiction, entails an ability to make racial discernments: critique constitutively includes racial critique. It makes sense, then, that in *The American* the Bellegardes' emphasis on extreme cultural discernment is founded on a commitment to racial purity that entrenches them within a discourse of white supremacy Newman would have encountered in the South during the war. James casts Madame and Urbain de Bellegarde—the "iron" matriarch and patriarch of "the clan" (120)—as conspicuously white. Reminiscent of the planter James saw at Sing-Sing in his childhood, whom he described as wearing a stylish, "cool loose uniform of shining white" (*Autobiography* 100), Urbain wears a "white waistcoat" (290) when at the opera, and "caress[es] one of his fair whiskers with one of his white hands" (184–85). His mother, likewise, has a "white, intense, respectable countenance" (180).

The “impartial eye” (104) with which Newman perceives Europe, on the other hand, troubles the narrator and presumably also James, since it implies a social and aesthetic leveling: “It is to be feared that his perception of the difference between good architecture and bad was not acute, and that he might sometimes have been gazing with culpable serenity at inferior productions” (104–05). As Roslyn Jolly claims, James usually uses the theme of tourism to call attention to the characters’ “‘subjective’ concerns” (348).¹⁰ But Newman’s lack of ulterior motive suggests that travel is doing different work in *The American*. Unlike Daisy and Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller* (1879), for instance, who use travel to court one another, Newman sees simply for the sake of seeing, a kind of apprehension that indexes an indifference to cultural distinctions more broadly. “I want the biggest kind of entertainment a man can get,” Newman proclaims (58), “People, places, art, nature, everything! I want to see the tallest mountains, and the bluest lakes, and the finest pictures, and the handsomest churches, and the most celebrated men, and the most beautiful women.” But Newman’s industrialist valuation of abundance has influenced his ability to perceive difference. Later, for example, he tells Tristram that he wants to see Mont Blanc, Venice, “Amsterdam, and the Rhine” (9), and he “even talked about Rome and the Nile” (101). Newman’s self-proclaimed specialty in manufacturing—a profession that makes irrelevant notions of an original, distinction, and difference—has rendered his judgment strikingly indiscriminating. The amalgamated list of sights and attractions Newman wishes to see creates the image of a vast, undifferentiated panorama that does not privilege any one location over another. To the contrary, Newman “looked with an impartial eye upon great monuments and small” (104). The free market, in James’s view, levels people, places, and things; it effects a regrettable descent into democratic homogeneity.¹¹ Thus, Newman’s inability to make aesthetic distinctions during his European tour has racially democratic implications. Unable to tell the difference between superior and inferior “productions,” Newman is also capable of saying, as he does to Mr. and Mrs. Tristram, that “I have no prejudices . . . I would marry a Japanese if she pleased me” (73). Newman’s industrialism implies an indifference to cultural and racial distinctions.

And though Newman may be white, the workers populating his factories back in the US are likely not, and hence he represents a form of capitalist modernity made possible by workers of obscure origin. Newman is the product and practitioner of a capitalism thriving in the context of, and in key respects thanks to, the changing racial and

ethnic demographics of late-nineteenth-century America that made patricians anxious. The emancipation of over three million slaves and the first wave of mass immigration between 1860 and 1890 that witnessed the arrival of over ten million people to the US caused a “dramatic increase in social heterogeneity” in the era (Mizruchi 277). This wave of immigration provided a workforce of laborers of non-white Anglo-Saxon origin with theoretical access to upward mobility. Patrician, Anglo-Saxon Americans felt threatened by the newly risen “vulgar millionaires,” who themselves were “ignorant immigrants” (Herman 158) and employed immigrant workers. Northern industrialism broadly speaking, and the Union victory more acutely, also brought with it the stereotype of the Yankee businessman, “pockets bulging with war profits” (Franklin 9), who invested in Western lands, mines, and railroads—the prototype of Newman himself. Indignation and bitterness surfaced among Eastern intellectuals soon after the Civil War, Arthur Herman explains, since these demographic shifts encouraged James’s elite circles to believe that industrial capitalism prompted moral and social decay. James’s Northeastern elite thus found common ideological ground with Confederate whites who were resentful of Union victory and harbored “wild, nightmarish fear” (3) both of their government’s infiltration by so-called “Negro-rule” (94) and violent black uprising. Lizzie’s sarcastic remark to Newman, “Bravo! You are the great Western Barbarian, stepping forth in his innocence and might, gazing awhile at this poor effete Old World, and swooping down on it” (68) echoes that Southern and Northern conservative fear of geographic and cultural infiltration by a barbaric racial other. James implies that Newman’s participation in an economic regime characterized by a rise in social heterogeneity has affected his ability to make critical discernments.

It is no wonder, then, that the catalyst for Newman’s expulsion from the Bellegarde family is Valentin’s death, since it plays out, in miniature, what a marriage between Newman and Claire would mean for white patrician culture. Valentin—the “soul of honour” (366)—is killed by Stanislas Kapp, a wealthy, anticlerical, and “thick-nosed” (340) industrialist from Northeastern France with a “massive watch-chain” (303), whose existence is a reminder of the growing social irrelevance and financial disadvantage of the Bellegardes. Valentin’s death heralds the destruction of the Bellegarde way of life, adopting the force of History: “What had happened to him seemed to have, in its violence and audacity, the force of a real calamity,” James writes, “the strength and insolence of Destiny herself. It was unnatural and monstrous, and he had no arms against it” (332). The duel is the

point at which not only the Bellegarde family, but also the novel itself, can no longer entertain the possibility of wedding Claire to Newman, since it reminds the Bellegardes—and James—that at stake in capitulating to Northern, abolitionist industrialism is the destruction of white Southern racial and cultural purity, a danger James is unwilling to countenance. Valentin's doctor M. Ledoux proclaims that "when a man has taken such excellent measures for his salvation as our dear friend did last evening, it seems almost a pity he should put it in peril again by returning to the world" (329). As if in response to this very claim, James sends Claire to Fleurières, sheltering the Bellegarde traditions by cloistering them "out of the world" (355) and safely within the walls of the convent.

James refuses the marriage between Newman and Claire, and thus resists imagining a national reunification. But he also prevents Claire from participating in the aristocratic marriage market. While James exhibits sympathy with patrician racial and economic anxieties, this turn in narrative events has democratic implications. In the "Charleston" section of *The American Scene*, James contemplates a garden wall. Faced with the "real walls" that make "real gardens" and admit entrance through "real doors," James takes a few moments to appreciate what the North is incapable of providing him: the feeling of being safely and irrevocably "*within*," of having the "possibility of retreat" (297). One "sacrificed the North," he writes, "to this finer feeling for the enclosure." To be in the South, for James, means to have privacy, and "what such Southern walls generally shut in proves exactly what one would have wished . . . some dim dream that things were still as they had been—still pleasant behind garden walls—before the great folly" (298). The reality of the wall, garden, and door, enables James to indulge in a fantasy wherein not only the "great folly" of Southern secessionism had not destroyed the region, but also, implicitly, wherein James would not have to encounter the all too "intimate presence of the negro" (276), as he had done just moments ago, in seeing evidence of miscegenation in the "elderly mulattress." *The American* also parts company with "*terra firma*" (*Art of the Novel* 35), to borrow a phrase from the 1907 preface, as the very "real" walls of the Carmelite convent, themselves a "journey . . . far southward" (344), preserve a fantasy in which the South remains racially and culturally pure and sequestered from the realities of its history and its future under national reunification.¹²

James had conflicting views, in fact, regarding the ending of his novel. In his letters both to Howells and Elizabeth Boott in the late 1870s, he justifies the Bellegardes' retraction of consent and Claire's

departure to the Carmelite convent on the grounds that Newman and Claire would not be able to overcome their cultural differences, let alone find a place to live that would suit both their needs. In his 1907 preface to the novel, however, he lingers on the implausibility of the Bellegardes' retraction, insisting that they "would positively have jumped" (*Art of the Novel* 35) at Newman's offer, given their material circumstances. He claims that in leaving his romantic, non-realist impulse unchecked, he compromised the believability of his story. We might then ask, what were the affordances of that flight of romantic fancy? In the novel's notoriously abrupt shift, when the Bellegardes relinquish their end of the bargain, the novel reneges on Newman's emancipatory promise and, implicitly, shelters Claire from contamination by what would inevitably be a racially heterogeneous, commercial capitalist US. However, thwarting the reunion plot has secondary gains; sending Claire to the convent also keeps her from marrying Lord Deepmere, a member of the English aristocracy with whom the Bellegardes were happy to create an alliance. He would have been a fine suitor, entrenched as he is within the same feudal traditions as Claire's family. Were the Bellegardes to marry Claire to Deepmere, they would not have to abandon their "wicked" and "grizzled" customs (139). Hence, while Claire's retreat to the convent honors James's fantasy of a prelapsarian South, it is simultaneously a protective gesture against another form of bondage.

But even though at this point in postbellum history James was sympathetic to the abolitionist views prevalent in the North and his own family, his politics were never liberal enough to tolerate the social and political consequences of marrying Claire to Newman. Such a union would attenuate the aristocratic (be it Southern or French) distinction he so valued. To make the Civil War and Reconstruction context more visible and Claire's subjugation explicitly equivalent to that of a slave in the South would put James in the position of either having to free her by subjecting her to the racial and class heterogeneity of modern industrial capitalism, or keep her enslaved, which would contradict the sanctity of individual freedom. Neither satisfies James's ambivalent politics. Keeping the Civil War and Reconstruction context the secret behind *The American's* international theme affords him the flexibility to both gratify his political desires and allay his fears. That obliquity protects him, ultimately, from having to admit that the burgeoning cosmopolitanism of his fiction excludes the racial subjects who provide the economic foundation of the very Euro-American cosmopolitan cultures of refinement he venerates.

The novel, finally, acknowledges that the material conditions of the plantation South form the foundations of national modern prosperity. Even for all the ways that James comes to discredit the patrician ideal—recognizing in their way of life labor objectification, sexual exploitation, and afterlives of feudal slavery—he also acknowledges that modern industrialism perpetuates or reinvents some of the same threats to human agency as the slave regime, that they provide the conditions for the burgeoning of global capitalism. For while Newman is averse to the more explicit forms of corporeal and paternalistic ownership that constitute the traditions of the Bellegardes, he is himself paternalistic—as Rowe and Haralson have noted in “The Politics of Innocence” and “James’s *The American*,” respectively—in ways that might be more understated than those of the French nobility or the slaveholding South, but no less ominous. Despite Newman’s promise to free Claire from the Bellegardes, it is unclear whether when he tells her that with him she will be “as safe . . . as in your father’s arms” (242), or when he speaks to her “as if he had been talking to a much-loved child” (170), there is much of a difference from when Madame de Bellegarde says that her “power . . . is in my children’s obedience” (317).

Indeed, while the Bellegardes intend to sell Claire off, James implies that commercial production, too, strips the self of its agency. Newman confesses to Valentin, for instance, that in a needle factory, he saw a man get “picked up [by a manufacturing machine] as neatly as if he had been prodded by a fork, swallowed down straight, and ground into small pieces” (265). While Newman is travelling to nurse his heartache, Mrs. Bread, whom he has brought to work for him, contemplates that “a servant was but a mysteriously projected machine, and it would be as fantastic for a housekeeper to comment upon a gentleman’s absences as for a clock to remark upon not being wound up. No particular clock . . . kept all time, and no particular servant could enjoy all the sunshine diffused by the career of an exacting master” (443). James thus suggests the continuities between the objectification of the human body in the slave regime and capitalist modernity, limning a lineage from Southern slavery to the quintessential perils of modern industrialist prosperity. Newman would not only be unable to protect Claire from such commodification, he would also be securing her place within it.

The price of emancipation, that is, seems to be the reimposition of economic slavery in industrial modernity, allowing the South to reconstruct its labor system, supported by Northern capital, on the backs of laborers only nominally free. In going back to the US

without revealing the Bellegardes' secret, Newman—and James—can preserve the fiction of a culture of refinement uncontaminated by its own internal contradictions. The last chapters of *The American* echo this disavowal through a tropology of repressed evidence and the destruction of writing. Newman is tortured by ambivalence before he finally decides not to sound the secret of the Bellegardes, that the Madame both murdered her husband—the late Marquis who harbored egalitarian, implicitly reconciliatory, attitudes—and was considering doing the same to Claire. The process through which Newman comes to know their secret is cloaked in the language of writing and reading, documentation and discovery, divulging the novel's conflicted relationship to its obscured recognitions of French and Southern aristocratic barbarity. On his deathbed, M. de Bellegarde writes the secret on a sheet of paper in French, a language its English recipient, Mrs. Bread, cannot understand, and in a scrawl that barely reveals its message. The paper itself was “covered with pencil marks,” James writes, “which at first, in the feeble light, seemed indistinct” (391). Newman's “fierce curiosity,” though, “forced a meaning from the tremulous signs,” translating the note into English and drawing out its hidden significance. When Mrs. Bread asks Newman whether and how he wants to wield the secret as leverage to win back Claire's freedom, she asks, “You want to publish them—you want to shame them?” (375). Though Newman ultimately throws the trace history of the Bellegardes' secret into the flames and hence resists taking revenge against their betrayal, James has published it in the form of *The American*.

The Civil War and its aftermath thus function aesthetically in *The American* as a protruding subtext—the novel's secret. However, like M. de Bellegarde's untranslated note, the novel provides “tremulous signs” (391) of a more full-throated indictment of the institution of slavery than elsewhere in James's career. That indictment—the acknowledgment of the barbarism of slave society—the novel disavows, or burns, as it were, to maintain the idealized version of the South that appears in *The Bostonians* and *The American Scene*, that romanticized South as the American haven of privacy, distinction, and gallantry. Those later, more open considerations of the South also confront more explicitly the mechanics of disavowal. Basil's experience in Mississippi, for instance, allows him to perceive that Northeastern suffragists usurp Verena's personal freedom even as they claim to provide her with it. In *The American Scene*, James learns that though he may try to catch a glimpse of the Southern garden, he is unable to see past the figure of racial mixture. But in hiding the

South from plain view, *The American* both indulges in a more impassioned contemplation of the depravity of the slave regime and the continuation of its terms into industrial modernity, while also admitting the need to suppress that recognition for the Euro-American cosmopolitan project to remain intact and undisturbed. The novel's political ambivalence is evident, as we have seen, in the extreme ambiguity of Newman's role in the novel: as a republican industrialist in relation to both French and Southern patricians and fully participating in the process of objectification engendered by capitalist modernity; as a would-be cosmopolitan and as a "Western barbarian" (68) indexing James's fears regarding increased social heterogeneity; and, finally, as an embodiment of emancipatory promise in both a Southern and French context, on which James ultimately defaults. The secrecy surrounding the South in *The American* allows him to leave all of the novel's myriad political contradictions unresolved.

Appiah argues that the Victorian adventurer and colonial officer Sir Richard Francis Burton, in his appreciation of the multiple cultures he encounters during his travels with the East India Company, was cosmopolitan in that he "recogn[ized] that human beings are different and that we can learn from each other's differences" (4). On the other hand, however, Burton also expressed intolerance for certain groups of people (such as the Turks and the Spanish) and receptivity to forms of institutional violence (such as slavery in Brazil, the ritual of *sati*, and polygamy among Mormons). Because of that, Appiah contends, Burton was "anti-cosmopolitan" (1) in that he did not honor what Appiah considers the other crucial tenet of cosmopolitanism: "the recognition of our responsibility for every human being" (7–8). According to Horta's recent argument, Burton takes on "two roles" (154) in Appiah's study: "both the cosmopolitan who seeks out the experience of difference and the counter-cosmopolitan who cannot quite escape the residual prejudices of his early upbringing." Horta goes on to suggest that to attribute the limits of Burton's cosmopolitan empathy to a counter-cosmopolitan parochialism is to overlook how cosmopolitanism can accommodate parochialism. Burton's dexterity in adopting and accepting foreign customs and beliefs coexists, Horta points out, with his intolerance. Burton's biases are not so much contradictions of his cosmopolitanism, Horta submits, as they evince a kind of inherent "asymmetry" (165). "Tolerance and prejudice are intertwined with cosmopolitan experience" (154), Horta writes, since the cognitive flexibility that allowed Burton to immerse himself in myriad cultural, religious, and linguistic communities also allowed him to adopt, with equal flexibility, the

prejudices of those communities. Cosmopolitanism can just as easily support in-egalitarian beliefs, Horta shows, as it can attenuate them.

Much of the cosmopolitan lens on James's work tends to obfuscate the racialism that permeates his fiction, no doubt because the two mindsets seem incongruous with one another. How could James expose, in Despotopoulou's words, "the artificiality and porosity of national and cultural boundaries" (142) while also harboring regressive views about, for example, the impact of African American emancipation and enfranchisement on the socioeconomic landscape of the postbellum US? How could he simultaneously critique the forms of racialized power exercised by the antebellum Southern gentry and warp his novel's narrative to protect its feminized ideal from being compromised by that gentry's decline? Horta's view is helpful because it shows how the extranational ethics of cosmopolitanism can accommodate and even cultivate prejudice. But James's quiet invocation of the antebellum South in *The American* suggests two importantly different ways that prejudice can—or unfortunately cannot help but—be conserved. James is not adopting natively French prejudices. Rather, *The American* secretly registers, as if from embarrassment, that the deep history of European colonialism and its dependence on racialized labor will always compromise the cosmopolitan ideal from the outset by forcing it to be predicated on racism, be it parochial or extranational. No less importantly, the cosmopolitan gesture enables James to smuggle in his own prejudices. For precisely in exercising the cosmopolitan perspicacity that allows him to see the continuities between European sovereign brutality and the patrician elitisms of the US, James is able to present himself and his novel as extranational, while hiding his own kinds of bigotry. In and amongst the layers of French and Southern reference, James's racial fears are harder to catch and easier to preserve. An inevitable consequence for James, then, of using France as a "conduit" (Greenson 4) to his South, is that the "asymmetry" (Horta 165) of his cosmopolitanism—and any Euro-American cosmopolitanism that does not extend its aims to those racial subjects on whose labor its culture and prosperity is predicated—is able to thrive.

When Christopher Newman sets foot on French soil, he evokes the newly reunified US, establishing its movement toward global imperial ascendancy fueled by the ideology of American exceptionalism. His Yankee intolerance for the cruelties of "bondage" (170) associated with the Old World are consistent with the master narrative of the US as a republic "untouched," in Greenson's words, "by the binary power extremes understood to organize all other human societies—mon-

arch/subject, master/servant, empire/colony" (3). But by enfolded the cultural codes of royalist France into those of the Southern gentry, James also reveals the reality behind that national narrative: when Newman goes abroad he finds shadows of the "frank demons" from home (4). And though the traces of antebellum Southern power structures in *The American's* French plot suggest James's sympathy with Newman's indictment of French and Southern aristocratic violence, that very doubling betrays James's acknowledgement of the stain of extranational bigotry on any cosmopolitan aspiration across the US and Europe. Berman argues persuasively, of James's later fiction, that his cosmopolitanism "hinges . . . on the insistently paradoxical relationship among cosmopolitanism, nativism, and the ideal woman" (32). In this much earlier moment in James's career, just as he is laying the groundwork for his cosmopolitan oeuvre, I argue, the Southern material allows him to recode and redistribute his social and racial intolerance that work counter to his own cosmopolitan aspirations. the space of the cosmopolis—that "floating world," to borrow Kazuo Ishiguro's phrase so central to Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style* (109)—which James forges from the superimposition of monarchic France onto the antebellum South, permits him to conceal his political anxieties and the political anxieties internal to cosmopolitanism itself. Finding James's South in the international theme of *The American* means discovering the ways that the very act of "thinking beyond the nation" (Walkowitz 2) can be bound up irrevocably with thinking within it. It also allows us to see that the cosmopolitan gesture can afford the discursive shelter to indulge extranational intolerance, putting us in the position to challenge the assumption of cosmopolitanism's democratic valences. For while the cosmopolis can foster an ethical criticality, it can also, as in the case of James, leave uninterrogated the very prejudices that the vision of a "floating world" (Walkowitz 109) putatively discredits.

Notes

- I am grateful to Gene Jarrett, John T. Matthews, Nancy Armstrong, Maurice Lee, Sarah Gleeson-White, and the anonymous reviewers at *MFS* for their feedback on this essay at its various stages of development.
1. Michaels and Haralson depart from this trend in the scholarship. Michaels looks at *What Maisie Knew* to explore the class politics enfolded into the racial politics of Jim Crow. "[T]he utopian vision of Jim Crow," Michaels writes, "was not the separation of the genteel from the vulgar

but the separation of the genteel white from the genteel black. The way to save an American Maisie from 'hideous' women on the omnibus was not to identify such women as black and vulgar but to identify them as black *instead of vulgar*" (288). And although Haralson does give considerable attention to *The American Scene* in his essay "The Person Sitting in Darkness," in which he investigates James's complex relationship to the South, he also takes a synoptic view of the Southern points of reference in much of James's fiction, including *Roderick Hudson*, *The Ambassadors*, and his autobiography.

2. Blair and Warren are also important exceptions, in that they depict James's cosmopolitanism as entangled within a racialist project. Blair shows that "when . . . relocated in the embattled arena of [nineteenth-century] race thinking, James's signature international 'theme'" (16) becomes a channel through which he negotiates what throughout her book Blair calls the "racial theater" of nineteenth-century US (15–59). Warren refers to works including *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Princess of Casamassima*, and the short story "The Point of View" to argue that the cosmopolitanism of James's fiction is often inflected by, if not predicated on, an investment in "black/white racial differences" (20). See Warren 18–47.
3. For another excellent resource on the South as a contested fictional fantasy, see Duck.
4. French willingness to loan the Confederacy money is significant, given the South's difficulty with securing European support during the war. Judith Fenner Gentry calls the Erlanger loan "the only foreign loan effected during the American Civil War" (157).
5. Roxana Oltean, for instance, sees Newman as the quintessential New World colonial conqueror, casting his "desiring gaze" (270) over a romanticized, if not Orientalized, Parisian territory that she articulates in terms of a "native" peoples "on display" (272).
6. The Paris from which Vautrin intends to flee, in fact, is under Bourbon rule; the monarchy that he compares to the slave regime is the very same to which the Bellegardes remain loyal.
7. Newman appears to have made a fortune through business investments throughout the country and, just before arriving in Europe, to have foregone the opportunity to take revenge on someone who wronged him.
8. For Warren, James's inquiry into domestic racial politics begins in the early 1880s. "Though [James's] view of the aesthetic liabilities of the black social presence is not fully articulated . . . until *The American Scene*, it emerges in James's aesthetic in the early 1880s" (20). Warren's omission of *The American* seems generically determined; it is notoriously unclear whether the novel is realist or Romantic.

9. “On July 4 [1861] the elder Henry delivered the Independence Day oration at the invitation of his fellow-citizens. He entitled it ‘The Social Significance of Our Institutions’ . . . it was a vivid statement, surcharged with the emotions of the moment” (Edel 168–69). Edel quotes the speech at length: “Our very constitution binds us . . . to disown all distinctions among men . . . to disallow privilege the most established and sacred, to legislate only for the common good, no longer for those accidents of birth or wealth or culture which spiritually individualize men from his kind . . . and inexorably demand the organization of such unity. It is this immense constitutional life and inspiration we are under which not only separate us from Europe, but also perfectly explain by antagonism that rabid hostility which the South has always shown towards the admission of the North to a fair share of government patronage, and which now provokes her to the dirty and diabolic struggle she is making to give human slavery the sanction of God’s appointment” (169).
10. Most recently, for instance, Ryan Stuart Lowe has looked at the theme of tourism in *Roderick Hudson* and *Daisy Miller* to investigate James’s contribution to the tradition of what Lowe calls the “tourist love story” (34). More specifically, he argues that tourism in these works becomes the axis along which heteronormative and queer erotics get articulated in James’s fiction.
11. For more on how Newman’s industrialism dissolves difference, see Porter.
12. Similarly, Greeson argues that James turns the South in *The American Scene* into a pliable signifier through which to channel his own complex thoughts about the status of the US as an imperial power. See 286–88.

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