

## Agonizing Affection

### Affect and Nation in Early America

Mourning is immensely reassuring because it convinces us of something we might otherwise easily doubt: our attachment to others.

— Adam Phillips, *Terrors and Experts*

Is it possible anymore to imagine the shape and substance of American nationality, and of the bonds that comprise it, in the absence of visions of trauma, woundedness, suffering, and bereavement? Does the ideal of national cohesion have any more prominent form of expression in America than the language of affect, of impassioned feeling, proper to scenes of tragic severance and loss? We do not, of course, come by these matters as innocently as once we might have. But even before the events of 11 September 2001 gave these once-academic questions such horrific resonance, a number of critics had observed the strangely insistent correlation, in the American context, of national belonging and something like devastation. Writing in 1998, for instance, Mark Seltzer described the contemporary American scene as a “wound culture.” “The contemporary public sphere,” he writes, “represents itself to itself, from the art and culture scenes to tabloid and talk TV, as a culture of suffering, states of injury, and wounded attachments” (254). He goes on to describe the peculiar “sociality of the wound,” arguing that in wound culture, “one discovers the sociality that gathers, and the public that meets, in the spectacle of the untoward accident: the pathological public sphere” (278). Similarly, Lauren Berlant has argued that in a much broader swath of American liberal democracy, ranging across centuries, subjects have been bound to the nation “through a universalist rhetoric not of citizenship per se but of the capacity for suffering and trauma at the citizen’s core” (“Poor Eliza” 636). The sense of belonging that results, Berlant suggests, “involves a fantasy scene of national feeling”: “In this imaginary world,” she writes, “the sentimental subject is connected to others who share the same feeling” (“Poor Eliza” 646). Woundedness, suffering, trauma: the modern citizens these critics evoke

are less “subjects of violence” than of *feeling*: convulsed and, in turn, galvanized in a sense of collectivity by their shared emotional responses to the suffering before them.<sup>1</sup>

From one angle, everything about these dynamics seems relentlessly modern, as contemporary as the new millennial rhetoric of war, or the still-otherworldly moving images of airplanes diving into skyscrapers. But we deceive ourselves if we imagine our present fascination with the nation’s affective states to be some strictly latter-day declension — a fall from a more vigorously conceived ideal of national citizenship into an often mawkish or opportunist sentiment. As it happens, the question of affect, impassioned feeling, and American nationality has a startlingly long history, one that stretches back as far as the Puritans, and animates with particular vibrancy the era of the nation’s founding, when the matter of affect and its place in civic life became the source of a remarkable degree of contention and volatility. That era, and the volatility that courses through its political and literary accounts of affect, will be my primary object of study in this essay. But in a curious and sometimes unsettling way, my own sense of its defining dynamics has been ghosted throughout by questions and concerns that, in our present moment, seem anything but antiquated. We may now find ourselves speaking with new urgency about war and bereavement, collective affect and the fate of the nation; but it is a conversation that, as I hope to show, precedes us by centuries.

We tend, of course, to think otherwise of the era of the Founders. Indeed, from one point of view — a rather commonsensical point of view, informed as much by Plato’s *Republic* as the Federalist papers — the question of affect and its relation to early American civic life is fairly simple to answer: ungoverned and ungovernable intensities of feeling can have virtually no place within a civic structure premised upon such high-minded Enlightenment principles as calm orderliness, dispassionate reason, and well-tempered rationality. Strong feeling would appear, in fact, to undermine both these principles and the new republic that was hoping to embody them before the world. Nor is the commonsensical point of view very easily disparaged. In truth, it is borne out, in a variety of ways, across a wide swath of postrevolutionary writing.

Consider, for instance, Benjamin Franklin’s famously dispassionate *Autobiography*, a text which untiringly demonstrates how the exemplary republican statesman must at all times conduct himself with supreme cool-

ness and detachment, and must allow none of the vexations of personal animosity or affection to trouble his civic department—a text which also, as Christopher Looby shrewdly observes, protractedly postpones any discussion of the “Affairs of the Revolution” and the messy enmities it entailed for its protagonist. Indeed, the very grammar of the republican virtue Franklin wishes to embody, premised as it is upon a self-abstracting *disinterestedness*, appears to cancel the social value of affect, reading it as a dire symptom of the self’s interested partiality (Looby 124–31, Warner 73–96). The novels of the postrevolutionary era, too, strike similarly cautionary notes. Fuelled especially by reports of the French Revolution and its bloody after-effects, as well as by the frightening specter of Shay’s Rebellion, these novels warn again and again of the grave dangers, to person and nation alike, of unreasoning passion, impetuous desire, and the general “carnality” that emerges, monsterlike, when reason fails to subdue affect and sensation. We need only think of Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntley*, in which the promptings of reason and studied temperance so spectacularly fail to insulate the young would-be republican narrator against the call of impulse and bodily sensation that, in due time, he sleepwalks into scenes of escalating carnage, his body having literally run away with him.<sup>2</sup> And as the telling use of “savage” natives in Brown’s novel ought to remind us, and as several generations of critics have noted, the racial divisions of the early republic were themselves quite commonly transformed, by novelists and politicians alike, into moralized allegories of national life, dramas of civic peril in which the savage Indian and brutish African figure chiefly as emblems of the hazards, to the new American social world, of affect and the carnal unmoored from proper reason. In this way, the dangers of an excess of feeling often came to be *racialized*: to be projected onto and sequestered within the bodies of Native and African Americans, against whose untamed carnality the new white republic might define itself as confidently rational and self-governing.<sup>3</sup> In all, it is not without good reason that one might presume that impassioned feeling was understood in early American civic life as, precisely, a threat: a menacing, if admittedly ineradicable element which could, if left untended, lastingly damage the virtue, stability, and health of the new nation.

This is not, of course, the whole of the story, either of the early American republic or of the Age of Reason more generally. A number of elements of eighteenth-century life complicate any notion of the idealization of dis-

passionate reason. In recent years, scholars have undertaken a painstaking reconstruction of a late eighteenth-century sensibility, prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic, less terrorized by impassioned feeling than fascinated by it, and anxious as well to consider the range of civic meanings and uses such feeling might carry. Claudia Johnson, for example, has shown decisively how revolutionary excesses of the 1780s and '90s could be, and were, read not as scenes of passion overriding reason, but the reverse: for a writer like Burke, Johnson argues, these were scenes in which the "monstrously coldhearted men" reared up by Enlightenment philosophy suffered a cataclysmic failure of proper feeling, which allowed them to forget the "emotions of veneration, awe, desire, solicitude, gratitude, endearment" that are due to "customary practices" and "the persons who represent them" (7, 3). Considering in detail "the competitiveness over the prized quality of sensitivity," and how the abrogation of the feminized sphere of feeling by *men* constrained the political and aesthetic possibilities available to women writers, Johnson describes a cultural moment in which the capacity to feel, properly and deeply, was an essential measure of one's civic virtue (14). Bringing strains of this argument to America, Julia Stern has commandingly demonstrated how early American novels, however they may seem to warn against unguarded affect and its threat to dispassionate reason, nevertheless depend intimately upon impassioned feeling, especially feelings of grief and sympathy. In Stern's reading, these novels (*The Power of Sympathy*, *Charlotte Temple*, *The Coquette*) turn to such feeling with particular urgency, precisely when they attempt to imagine a form of cohesion, a unifying mutuality, which might repair an America fairly shattered by an apparently parricidal war, and still suffering sharp internal divisions and inequities. Taken together, the works of Johnson and Stern, along with more recent works by Elizabeth Barnes, Julie Ellison, Bruce Burgett, and Glenn Hendler, envision a late eighteenth-century world in which the terrors of revolution, the pain of revolutionary rupture, and anxieties over national cohesion all contribute to the making of a civic atmosphere in which affect figures less as a specter to be banished than as an elemental social fact, whose potential uses must, accordingly, be considered and cultivated.<sup>4</sup>

In the essay that follows, I mean to extend this work, and bring to bear upon it a particular set of questions about affect, intimacy, and their role in the emergent nation-languages at play in the early republic. Juxtaposing

several moments from the work of Phillis Wheatley and Thomas Jefferson in which an intensity of feeling reads as an explicitly civic concern, I suggest that in early American national life a capacity for impassioned response and relation to the world was, for many, a veritable prerequisite for virtuous citizenship. This was so, I argue, in large part because imaginings of the early republic's fraught, fragile, and always rather speculative cohesion returned again and again to the idea of a far-reaching affective connectedness—an odd civic intimacy—that might transpire between the dispersed citizens of the republic, and thereby invest them with a kind of present-tense unity and deeply felt coherence. At the center of this argument is a reading of Thomas Jefferson's initial draft of the Declaration of Independence, and of the astounding language of its concluding paragraphs (most of which was excised by Congress in their revisions of the text). Here, in the document's turn to the "unfeeling brethren" in England and subsequent meditation on the "agonizing" pains of separation, I suggest that we find Jefferson's most sustained rhetorical answer to the pressing dilemma of revolutionary authority—the problem, that is, of how to speak in the name of a republic that does not properly exist, prior to its declared self-creation. That Jefferson's answer to this dilemma is to imagine a specifically *affective* unity for the nation, one which pre-dates and so authorizes its political unity, is fascinating not only for the way it places impassioned feeling at the very center of this new Enlightenment republic. In the same movement, Jefferson's Declaration, and its invocation of a people made whole by an intimacy that somehow joins them even in their anonymity, deftly retrieves a strand of American nation-language that pre-dated the Revolution by more than a century, and that reaches as far back in the American archive as John Winthrop's "Modell of Christian Charity" of 1630. Jefferson's embrace of affect is of course not unqualified—indeed, in his rebuke of the poetry of Phillis Wheatley, which asks us to recall her "religion," Jefferson distances himself from the evangelical elevation of affect which had so convulsed the colonies in the revivals of the 1740s. As we shall see, though, Jefferson's distaste for the heightened affect of revivalism does not prevent him from offering a vision of the new nation as, precisely, a collectivity of the mutually wounded and bereaved, held together by nothing so much as its citizens' shared feelings of "agonizing" loss. For Jefferson the nationalist no less than Wheatley the poet, affect is, if not indispensable, enormously potent, and for reasons we moderns should have no trouble

recognizing: where once were only dispersed and loosely joined populations, it promises, at its grandest, to make a nation.

There is a striking and much-remarked moment in the middle of Wheatley's poem of 1772 "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth." Having welcomed the statesman, newly appointed as secretary of state for the American colonies, into a grateful New England, and having praised him as a leader who will bring "Fair *Freedom*" with him and put an end to "wanton *Tyranny*," she pauses in the third stanza to explain and, in a sense, defend herself:

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,  
 Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,  
 Whence flow these wishes for the common good,  
 By feeling hearts alone best understood,  
 I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
 Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat:  
 What pangs excruciating most molest,  
 What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?  
 Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd  
 That from a father seiz'd his babe below'd:  
 Such, such my case. And can I then but pray  
 Others may never feel tyrannic sway? (74)

In a variant draft of the poem, Wheatley at this moment imagines the new earl of Dartmouth reading the poem and beginning to "wonder, whence such daring Boldness sprung" (218). Such daring boldness, we might assume, refers at least in part to the unflustered confidence with which Wheatley—herself a young woman, an African, and a slave—has already presumed to wield an explicitly *civic* conceptual vocabulary. Prior to this stanza, Wheatley has not only suggested that the earl of Dartmouth will bring with him "Fair *Freedom*" and all its bright glory. She has noted as well, in terms considerably less abstract, the problems of "hated *faction*" and of "grievance unredress'd." From the first and second stanzas:

Long lost to realms beneath the northern skies  
 She [*Freedom*] shines supreme, while hated *faction* dies  
 No more, *America*, in mournful strain  
 Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain. (73, 74)

These moments are brief, but telling. Note that Wheatley's fluency here is not only with the rote allegorical emblems of *Freedom* and *Tyranny*. Rather, she has made herself at home in a lexicon vastly more concrete, and vastly more politically current. Up to the third stanza in the poem, hers has been a language which, however demure in its allegories, has also comprehended the functional, the *live* matters of colonial policy, of political faction and the redress of grievance. Indeed, once we come to recognize the presence of this live political vocabulary in the poem, we can begin, in turn, to hear in the autobiographical stanza a different kind of contention: not only a defense of her right to speak, but a broader argument, unfolded in a characteristically muted fashion, about the very nature of civic virtue and virtuous citizenship.

The moment of language in the stanza where such an argument catches, as it were, comes in its third line, where Wheatley refers to "these wishes for the common good." The phrase qualifies and, in essence, specifies the nature of the poet's avowed "love of *Freedom*," and does so in a way that politically attuned readers of Wheatley's day—their ears already pricked by the language of previous stanzas—would not have failed to recognize. Invested by the civic language that precedes it, the phrase "*wishes for the common good*," though uncontentiously plainspoken, nevertheless trembles with a very particular kind of political significance: it references the capacity of the civic-minded to put aside partiality and personal interest, and act strictly on behalf of the good of the whole of the republic, not of local factions within it. What it recalls, that is, is a specifically *republican* conception of political virtue.<sup>5</sup> In a language only moderately less explicit, then, Wheatley here keeps alive the kinds of current political speech she had introduced in the first two stanzas, and directs them toward questions (similarly live) of proper republican citizenship.

If the concept of republican virtue is, in this unobtrusive way, ushered into the stanza in its third line, the following line frames the whole of the subsequent slave-catcher passage by proposing a kind of thesis about the *nature* of such virtue: Wheatley refers to "these wishes for the common good, / *By feeling hearts alone best understood*." Republican virtue, it appears, is naturally (and perhaps *solely*) the province of those with "feeling hearts," who "alone" can comprehend the common good. Indeed, it is fair to say that this is less a matter of argument in the stanza than of presumption: a capacity for strong feeling, for the poem's purposes, simply *is*

an essential attribute of those who would attain to republican citizenship. What follows in the stanza is, accordingly, an elaboration of exactly this premise, though with a significant wrinkle. For in the episode of abduction recounted, all those who demonstrably possess such feeling are, notably, African:

I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
 Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat:  
 What pangs excruciating most molest,  
 What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?  
 Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd  
 That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd . . .

With these open-ended questions ("What pangs excruciating . . . What sorrows . . .") Wheatley means to attest both to her father's lacerating bereavement and to her own ability to imagine herself into, and feel on behalf of, the pain of another. It is, quite vividly, a moment of devastating loss, for father and daughter alike, *but also of sympathetic attachment sponsored by the experience of that loss*. Pondering her loss of him, Wheatley imaginatively identifies herself with the father who has himself lost; in essence, the feeling of bereavement prompts an identification with, and imagined attachment to, another who is bereaved. By contrast, the slaver here is guilty not only of human theft but, in a way the poem dwells upon more exactly, coldheartedness, a crippling inability to respond to another's suffering: "Steel'd was that heart, and by no misery mov'd / That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd." Reading the scene in concert with the stanza's initial proposition about feeling hearts and the common good, it appears that it is precisely this callousness, this failure of proper feeling, which unfits the slaver for the very republican citizenship for which Wheatley and her father, in the acuity of their grief, seem uniquely morally qualified. Though much else is going on in this stanza besides,<sup>6</sup> it offers a clear argument, in the first place, about the nature of republican virtue—namely, that it requires a capacity for proper feeling. And it insists, moreover, that such feeling resides not solely within white people (who have themselves, Wheatley implies, done much to show they are deficient in it). More than a defense of a slave's right to speak about freedom and tyranny, it is, more obliquely but no less urgently, a defense of the black citizen's very capacity for virtuous republican citizenship.



Wheatley's defense was prescient, and not least in its turn to the register of proper feeling. Not 10 years later Thomas Jefferson would write his now-famous summary rebuke of Wheatley. "Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately [sic]," he writes in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, "but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism" (*Notes* 140). Jefferson's offhand dismissal of Wheatley is brutal enough (we will return to its emphasis on her "religion") but it is in fact only a minor aside in a much broader argument. It comes in the midst of a protracted, and profoundly conflicted effort to prove Jefferson's "conjecture," his "suspicion only," that Africans in America are, as a result of specific and indelible racial attributes, so markedly inferior in body and mind to the race of whites that once freed, they must be removed entirely from the republic: it is an argument, in all, in which Jefferson attempts to talk himself and his reader into believing in a fundamental black incapacity for civic virtue, an incapacity that in turn makes for the impossibility, for Jefferson, of the very idea of free black citizenship.<sup>7</sup> But the manner in which Jefferson uses Wheatley to substantiate his argument—the terms in which he offers his rebuke—recall quite strikingly the terms of Wheatley's own poem to the earl of Dartmouth.

Speaking of a specifically expressive, *artistic* incompetence he claims is uniform to Africans, particularly those he has observed in America, Jefferson writes:

Misery is often the parent of the most affecting touches in poetry.— Among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry. Love is the peculiar oestrum of the poet. Their love is ardent, but it kindles the senses only, not the imagination. Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately; but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism. The heroes of the *Dunciad* are to her, as Hercules to the author of that poem. (*Notes* 140)

This passage only amplifies a moment earlier in the paragraph, where Jefferson writes:

They are more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether heaven has given life to us in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with them. (*Notes* 139)

Though Jefferson will go on to qualify this judgment, like many others of the argument, almost to the point of contradiction (“Whether further observation will or will not verify the conjecture, that nature has been less bountiful to them in the endowments of the head, I believe that in those of the heart she will be found to have done them justice” [Notes 142]), it is nevertheless made clear in these passages that, for Jefferson, black inferiority, and the alleged black incapacity for virtuous citizenship, are deeply rooted in the imputation of an incapacity to *feel* properly. Jefferson’s problem with blacks is not exactly that they cannot feel, but that they do not feel with the proper proportion, regulation, or intensity. Africans in America, he claims, do not love like the whites; they do not feel attachment like the whites; and, stunningly, they do not suffer bereavement like the whites: “*Their griefs are transient.*” Here, as in Wheatley’s poem, a capacity for virtuous citizenship is explained in relation to a capacity for affect, such that the one seems actually to depend upon the other. Thus, when, with an admitted “diffidence,” Jefferson attempts to justify the exclusion of blacks from his ideal republic, he turns to an estimation of their abilities to feel: to love, to be intimate, to suffer. Jefferson’s digressions are, in this sense, not as arcane or scatter-shot as some scholars have suspected: citizenship *demand*s a consideration of affective capacities in *Notes* because affect is, for Jefferson as for Wheatley, a measure of citizenship.

But why should a capacity for strong feeling be, in fact, a mark of one’s capacities for virtue, or as a citizen? Why do Jefferson and Wheatley seem to agree on this premise, even as they disagree radically about the relation of race to affective faculties? What about the conditions of early American life helps us to explain the form of civic logic at work here? One way to answer these questions is to recall that the matter of impassioned feeling, and of its national utility, had been on Jefferson’s mind for some years by the time he wrote *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in 1781 and ’82. It is very much on his mind, in fact, in the most famous document he would ever write: Jefferson’s initial draft of the Declaration of Independence goes so far as to place affect at the very founding of America — this despite the fact that the document’s occasion would seem to have warned against most any invocation of the turbulent, disordering force of feeling. Jefferson’s premiere task in drafting the Declaration of Independence is, after all, a terrifically delicate one: he must endeavor to couch a moment of revolutionary rupture in the terms not of violent passion but rather of both moral and histori-

cal *necessity*, the better to remove from the revolutionary actors any of the stain of reckless insurgency or self-interested usurpation. At the same time, however, he must grapple with the equally daunting problem of revolutionary authority: the problem, upon which many critics have commented, of how to declare independence on behalf of a nation, when that nation does not properly exist, *as* a nation, prior to its declared independence.<sup>8</sup> Jefferson employs several rhetorical strategies in the document to manage these twinned dilemmas, and they are worth considering in some detail, particularly for their invocation of impassioned feeling, *not* as an element threatening the very possibility of a stable independent republic, but as that which might secure, definitively, its urgently desired cohesion.

With respect to the problem of revolutionary rupture, the passive voice, with its convenient dislocation of agency, serves Jefferson tremendously well. We see this in the very opening of the text: “When, in the course of human events, *it becomes necessary* for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another . . .” (*Writings* 19).<sup>9</sup> We see here as well the beginnings of Jefferson’s canny response to the problem of revolutionary legitimacy—of just who speaks this text, and on what authority. For here, Jefferson refers not to colonies, the state, or to America, but to an abstract, hypothetical “*one people*.” Indeed, for most of the first two paragraphs, which Jefferson uses to lay out some general principles, his strategy is to refer again and again to this essentially hypothetical people, variously called “one people,” “the people,” “them,” and “mankind.” All the while, though, he allows the *relation* of that semi-imaginary “people” to an actual, historical America to remain calculatedly unspecified, to exist in a state of unresolving indeterminacy. Consider the following sentences from the second paragraph:

Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, begun at a distinguished period and pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide such sufferance new guards for their future security. Such has been the

patient sufferance of these colonies; and such now is the necessity which constrains them to expunge their former systems of government.

Here again, as in the opening, “these colonies” act not only under the strict constraint of necessity, but as a veritable extension of the principle guiding no particular collectivity, but “mankind” itself. (As Jay Fliegelman has it, “The agent [of revolutionary rupture] is hidden and submerged in a sea of seemingly mechanical necessity” [144].) We note, too, an unsettled modulation between the circumstances of “mankind,” a series of ambiguous references to “they,” “them,” and “their,” and the specific case of “these colonies.” One effect of such modulations is to render uncertain the exact constituency of the “we” in the great loose-pentameter line, *We hold these truths to be self-evident*. It seems a *we* that might refer either to the invoked “mankind,” or simply to the representatives of “these colonies,” as they are named several sentences later, or to some unspecified correlation of the two. It is, at any rate, by these careful attenuations, this unresolved shuttling between the abstract and the particular, that Jefferson manages to imply—without yet explicitly proposing—that America is indeed one people, though one whose principles and actions are neither idiosyncratic nor peculiar to it, but accord exactly with the laws of nature and history, God and man. In the same movement, that is, Jefferson both suggests the oneness of an American people, and shields them from accusations of renegade violence or usurpation.

But it is in the final section of the Declaration (most of which was excised by Congress) that Jefferson makes his most strident effort to consolidate the wandering “we” to which he had earlier referred with studied ambiguity. For it is here that he begins to describe exactly what form of adhesion has *already* forged the colonists into a like-minded collectivity capable of declaring itself. After spending several paragraphs laying bare the escalating offenses, moral and political, of the king of England, he makes an important turn:

Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend a jurisdiction over these our states . . . [W]e appealed to their native justice and magnanimity as well as to the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations which were likely to interrupt our connection and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice

and of consanguinity, and when occasions have been given them, by the regular course of their laws, of removing from their councils the disturbers of our harmony, they have, by their free election, re-established them in power. At this very time too, they are permitting their chief magistrate to send over not only soldiers of our common blood, but Scotch and foreign mercenaries to invade and destroy us. These facts have given the last stab to agonizing affection, and manly spirit bids us to renounce forever these unfeeling brethren.

After so much perspicuous rationalism, this turn to the register of *feeling*, to sensibility and its violations, speaks with particular vehemence. Jefferson makes two important moves here. First, in his assault on the “brethren” in England, he accuses them in particular of violating the ties of consanguinity, of so betraying the specifically affective bonds that had naturally linked Americans to Britons that the former are compelled, Jefferson writes, “to renounce forever these *unfeeling brethren*.” The suggestion here is that it is *this* betrayal more than any other, this failure of proper feeling, that marks the British, finally and conclusively, as unfit to rule or be ruled by. And this suggestion accords very well with the propositions about affective citizenship Jefferson would venture some years later, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

But the passage does much more: it begins to explain precisely why a fledgling nation would want to imagine its own citizenry to possess a unique capacity for impassioned feeling, and for the intimacies it promises to provoke and sustain. For it is exactly in this register, the register of affect and affective mutuality, that Jefferson at last makes his move to give concrete form to the people-ness he had previously only implied. As the coldness and hard-heartedness shown to the colonists have given, in Jefferson’s notably sentimental phrase, “the last stab to agonizing affection,” he goes on to conclude that

We must endeavor to forget our former love for them, and hold them as we hold the rest of mankind, enemies in war, in peace friends. We might have been a free and great people together; but a communication of grandeur and of freedom, it seems, is below their dignity. Be it so, since they will have it. The road to happiness and glory is open to us, too. We will tread apart from them, and acquiesce in the necessity which denounces our eternal separation.

The phrase is striking: *We must endeavor to forget our former love*. The dwelled-upon regrets, very nearly the aggrieved “be-it-so” of a wounded lover, move the text toward a similar pitch of high melancholic affect, one whose use, for this document, only now comes into focus. Endeavoring to forget *together*, bound to one another by nothing so much as this shared grief, the agonized “endeavor” of their mourning, the varied and scattered colonial Americans find themselves, once and for all, consolidated—and consolidated as, precisely, a *nation*, a unified and mutually aware collectivity of fellow-grievers. As imagined here, in this climactic moment, Jefferson’s is an American citizenry essentially traumatized into fellowship: wounded and bereaved by the severance of their dearest ties, and made one, in turn, by the bereavement they share. Nation-ness, on this account, is the precipitate of a mutuality of impassioned feeling, impelled in this case by the affective violence, the “agonizing affection,” involved in the fraying of relations with the “unfeeling brethren” in England.

That it is *this* form of unity, this affective cohesion, that makes Jefferson’s Americans “one people” is made clear by the dramatic change in rhetoric that follows hard upon his declaration of agonized affection. For now, after the moment of rupture and of unifying grief has been avowed, the obfuscations of agency (the passive-voice constructions, phrases like “we will . . . acquiesce in the necessity that denounces our eternal separation”) all vanish, and are replaced by a voice much more decisive, and much more defiant.

We therefore the representatives of the United States of America in General Congress assembled, do in the name, and by the authority of the good people of these states reject and renounce all allegiance and subjection to the kings of Great Britain and all others who may hereafter claim by, through or under them; we utterly dissolve all political connection which may heretofore have substituted between us and the people or parliament of Great Britain: and finally we do assert and declare these colonies to be free and independent states.

The rhetorical shift, from passivity to activity, from wariness to stridency, is unmistakable. If Jefferson resented the alterations to his document made by Congress (he later called them “mutilations”) it might have been not simply because they saw fit to excise both his condemnation of the slave trade (“this execrable commerce,” he called it) as well as his account of the

sentimental agonies of separation. More distressingly Congress also unraveled his carefully plotted rhetorical movement, from obscure agency to dramatic decisiveness, and they did so by tempering each and every one of Jefferson's verbs in the concluding paragraphs. Where Jefferson's United States could "*reject and renounce*," "*utterly dissolve*," and "*assert and declare*," the rather more diffident Congress would only

solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies *are*, and of right *ought to be* free and independent states; that they *are absolved* from all allegiance to the British crown, and that all political connection between them and the state of Great Britain *is*, and *ought to be*, totally dissolved.  
(my emphasis)

The finalized draft, we might say, muddies Jefferson's well-tempered construction; it loses the progressive steps of national cohesion that lead Jefferson, move by move, to the consolidated defiance of the final paragraphs. For in Jefferson's draft, America begins as an unclearly hypothetical "one people," and is then founded in its nation-ness not by the declaration of the state but *affectively*, in the grain of collective loss and rueful melancholy. ("We might have been a free and great people together . . .") Only *then*, after that avowal of a specifically affective cohesion, can the nation declare itself with all the directness and authority of a grammatically secure "we." What is lost by Congress, in other words, is Jefferson's meticulously fashioned narrative, his implicit *chronology*: his sense that the nation is first a collectivity made of intimacies and affect, and then a state; or rather, his sense that the nation-state invented in the Declaration merely ratifies a prior affective collectivity, securing its future and deriving from it the authority to declare itself in the first place.

Given these terms, it is little wonder that Jefferson's sense of citizenship should devolve upon affective capacities, abilities to *feel* properly (and particularly upon the ability to feel *grief* properly). To the degree that the nation is imagined as, precisely, an affective collectivity—a republic consolidated by a specifically affective mutuality which invests its citizens—then a capacity for impassioned feeling will, of necessity, be a prerequisite for national citizenship. For what secures the authority of the very state, in this account, is an affective cohesion that depends, for its live existence, on the capacity of a far-flung citizenry to feel both an acute grief and, in the grain of that grief, an attachment, an *intimacy* with unknown others.

Jefferson's state is, in a peculiar way, propped upon this prior affective cohesion, with the result that the very labor and obligation of citizenship—the “endeavor” of it, to use Jefferson's phrase—must be thought in terms of affect and intimacy, of feeling with the proper depth and extension.<sup>10</sup> A citizen's capacity for affect—here for grief-strickenness—is nothing less than a capacity for national belonging. And this, of course, is an attribute of no small value in a new and still alarmingly unformed republic.

Indeed, by imagining the new republic as a kind of affectively consolidated collectivity, Jefferson's Declaration manages to grapple with several of the *most* alarming prospects facing an America that was poised to become, at last, independent. In the first place, Jefferson's conclusion invokes many of the affective energies most threatening to the establishment of a new nation-state—but it does so only to translate these energies, ingeniously, into elements of national cohesion. Having run through the other affects involved—indignation, an anger no longer willing to be stifled, aggrieved distress, and resignation—Jefferson concedes, at the end, that the emotion that the prospect of rupture most forcefully occasions is, in truth, nearer to grief. What sounds, I think, with such plangency in Jefferson's unusually charged language is a remarkable acknowledgment of the depth of true dismay there was to be felt before the prospect of so much loss: of civic associations, of colonial protection, of a rich and mythologized past, of a shared heritage, and, not least, of a web of deep personal ties, familial and otherwise, sure to be grievously disrepaired. Jefferson's tactic, though, is to take up these urgent historical tensions—these affects which might forestall revolutionary resolve—and to make of them the very fiber of a new national coherence. For the grief that the recognized necessity of separation occasions, in Jefferson's conclusion, proves to be exactly the affect that will bind, make distinct, and hold together the new American national public. This is Jefferson's deft recuperative move, by which he transforms a potentially anti-revolutionary fearfulness into the stuff of national unity.

Moreover, Jefferson's vision of the nation as a specifically affective collectivity answers with equal fluency to the dilemmas of self-formation that were peculiar to an America about to become, in Seymour Martin Lipset's resonant phrase, “the first new nation.” Christopher Looby describes these early American dilemmas aptly: “In America,” he writes, “racial and ethnic diversity, religious heterogeneity, population dispersal, geographical unboundedness, practical innovation, and exile from historical precedent all contributed to problematize (if not demolish) traditional notions of



nationality.” Unable to draw upon those “massive and dense structures of inherited customary practices” that were to be the mainstay of European nationalisms, cut off as well from any storied, usable past, new Americans, as Jefferson found in the Declaration, were at something of a loss for applicable models of nation-ness (14). What Jefferson offers in the place of those forms—doing their work, as it were—is the sense of a kind of present-tense mutuality, of a far-reaching and oddly intimate connectedness, which might vouch for the Americans’ coherence as a nation. For Jefferson, finally, the shared grief over separation, and the anonymous attachments it sponsors, suggests the possibility of a new mode of national cohesion and belonging. And, for the reasons Looby describes, this was something much to be prized in early America.

The dream of an affect-nation, or of an intimate nationality, may thus have been exceptionally useful to Jefferson as he labored to solve the dilemmas of revolutionary authority, and it is well to note what we might call his historical responsiveness—his sensitivity to the particular imperatives and emotional energies of his day. But it would be a mistake to call Jefferson’s nationalist dream unprecedented: such a vision, however much Jefferson enlivens it, does not originate with him. Were she looking for it, Wheatley herself could have heard such strains in the American religious past. Jefferson’s own sources may have been nearer—nearer even than Rousseau. Reading the more vividly affective and aggrieved passages of the Declaration, we might suspect Jefferson of stealing a note from Thomas Paine, and of moderating and refining it. Paine had written only months earlier, in *Common Sense*,

But if you say, you can still pass the violations over, then I ask, Hath your house been burnt? Hath your property been destroyed before your face? Are your wife and children destitute of a bed to lie on, or bread to live on? Have you lost a parent or a child by their hands, and yourself the ruined and wretched survivor? If you have not, then you are not a judge of those who have. But if you have, and can still shake hands with the murderers, then are you unworthy the name of husband, father, friend, or love, and whatever may be your rank or title in life, you have the heart of a coward, and the spirit of a sycophant. (89)

Here Paine arraigns would-be loyalists for a failure of proper feeling, though the potentially feminine sentimentality evoked in the passage—*all* readers are invited to feel on behalf of the “ruined and wretched”—is

counterbalanced by Paine's characteristic yoking of such feeling to masculinity itself, and to properly masculine self-possession and indomitability. (Jefferson's own text, though less inclined to masculine defensiveness, is not free of such turns: it is, after all, "*manly spirit*" which compels the colonists "to renounce forever these unfeeling brethren.") But a note much more clearly related to Jefferson's was struck well before an absolute governmental separation from England was on the horizon, though other forms of severance and reformation certainly were.

Here is how John Winthrop imagined the American mission, before "America" itself was much more than a beachhead and an unforfeited promise. Approaching the shores of Boston in 1630, on the deck of the Puritan flagship *Arabella*, Winthrop insisted to his congregation that their charge was not merely to be God's exemplars in the New World ("we shall be as a City upon a Hill") but to do so by living their different lives with a profound sense of mutuality and compassionate connectedness. Of the "Covenant and sealed . . . Commission" given by the Lord to the Puritans, Winthrop writes,

[W]ee must be knitt together in this worke as one man, wee must entertaine each other in brotherly Affeccion, wee must be willing to abridge our selues of our superfluties, for the supply of others necessities, we must vphold a familiar Commerce together in all meeknes, gentlenes, patience and liberallity, wee must delight in eache other, make others Condictions our owne reioyce together, mourne together, labour, and suffer together, allwayes haueing before our eyes our Commission and Community in the worke, our Community as members of the same body, soe shall wee keepe the vnitie of the spirit in the bond of peace. (198)

In ringing biblical cadence, Winthrop insists that only the cultivated ties of "Affeccion" — which, he observes, will also include those of suffering and grief — can bind his followers into such cohesion that they might begin to acquit themselves of a task no less daunting, and no less supremely ambitious, than that of fulfilling God's promise in the fallen world. If this is the earliest expression of a particularly American exceptionalism — a glimpse of what one critic aptly calls "the infinite idealism of American democracy" (Marcus 89) — it is also a seminal description of a particular kind of American *collectivity*, one made whole and coherent by the specifically af-

fective ties which “knitt together” its citizens’ disparities. It is these ties, Winthrop suggests, whether affectionate or mournful, that will allow us to “abridge our selues of our superfluities” and so forge us into a sustaining mutuality.

If Jefferson’s text revisits and retrieves, for the Age of Reason, elements of the Puritan sense of American mission, as we are often told, it does so not least by returning to the vision of an America given unity and coherence less by the dictates of any state than by the specifically affective ties which somehow bond together its mutually anonymous citizens. Given this strand of nascent nation-language, and given its provenance in specifically religious discourse, we might now read Wheatley’s defense of the affective capacities of Africans as more than an exoneration of their general aptitude for civic life: it is, in these broader terms, nothing less than a call for inclusion in the affective circuit of American nationality itself. Insofar as America had been imagined as a collectivity whose coherence is secured by a mutuality of powerful feeling — and in particular by the mutuality sponsored by shared bereavement — then Wheatley’s demonstration that the griefs of Africans are indeed far more than transient, and are in fact experienced with lacerating intensity, places Africans in the new world decidedly *within* the fold of that American collective. What Jefferson and Wheatley might agree upon, in other words, is not solely the fact that good citizenship demands proper feeling, but that it does so because the nation itself is perhaps best conceived, is most compellingly imagined, as an affective collectivity. Of course, these utopian visions were soon to be qualified. It is no doubt true, for instance, that the Federalist reaction of the 1790s, with its fears of an unexpended revolutionary passion rendering the populace itself menacing and ungovernable, tempered any such affective enthusiasms. In this vein, Elizabeth Barnes has described the profound anxieties in late eighteenth-century America around the very idea of sympathy — a notion which, however attractive it might have been for some models of postrevolutionary national cohesion, nevertheless carries with it an alarming potential to unsettle the most deeply cherished affective proprieties, sexual as well as social, of the new republic (31–39). Still, for all the reaction and anxiety that would follow, the dream of an intimate nationality was powerfully present to Jefferson — we hear it both in his Declaration, and in his *Notes* — and was resonant as well, I would suggest, to Wheatley.

Suggestions of such a conceptual commonality would not, of course,

be pleasing to Jefferson, and not simply because of his uneasiness with the very notion of African accomplishment, though that is clearly at work as well. More crucially, I think, the question of Jefferson's disdain returns us, at a different angle, to the matter of affect and its sanctionable meanings and extensions. For if Jefferson in his excised conclusion to the Declaration sounds remarkably like a sentimental novelist, this does not mean that his embrace of affect is unqualified, nor that he would not wish to distinguish—on grounds not solely racial—his own invocations of strong feeling from those of Wheatley. Nowhere are these subtly differing inflections of affect more apparent than in Jefferson's abidingly wary regard for *religion*—and, more particularly, for precisely the religion that inspires Wheatley. We need only recall the terms of Jefferson's rebuke: "Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis Whately," he argues, "but it could not produce a poet." If this means to derogate Wheatley's poetry, it also implies, with only marginally less venom, a disparagement of whatever "religion" would "produce" such poetry. And from the first page of Wheatley's text onward, Jefferson, like the rest of Wheatley's audience, would have been at no loss to place Wheatley's ecclesiastical affiliations. Just after the title page, before the author's preface, the letter from her master, or the famous affidavit signed by the prominent men of Boston, the book's "Dedication" appears, and here Wheatley makes an offering to a generous patroness: "To the Right Honourable the Countess of Huntingdon."<sup>11</sup> For Jefferson, this would not have boded well.

Selina Hastings, countess of Huntingdon, was well-known in her century (and no less in the one following) as an immensely influential sponsor of famed Methodist preacher George Whitefield, who was her chaplain from 1748 until his death in 1770. She founded a college at Trevecca for the education of new evangelical Methodist ministers, and unfailingly supported Whitefield's evangelical mission in America, where he was a catalyst for the series of religious revivals, occurring roughly between 1738 and 1750, later named the Great Awakening.<sup>12</sup> That Wheatley is indebted to this evangelical tradition is of course made clear in her dedication, her poem to Whitefield, and also to the earl of Dartmouth himself (who was also associated with the Huntingdon circle).<sup>13</sup> But her affiliation expresses itself as well in the very matters we have already noted: her attentiveness to affect and its civic meanings. For one of the defining features of the Calvinistic Methodist revival, as many critics have noted, is its stri-

dent emphasis on a conversion experienced not solely intellectually, but passionately and somatically (Heimert and Miller v–lxi; Leverenz 225–71; Ferguson 44–79). In this tradition, conversion depends immensely on a “sense of the heart,” as Jonathan Edwards put it in his astounding text of 1746, “A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections” (531). Edwards is concerned here, as Alan Heimert and Perry Miller note, to rework Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding*—and is concerned more particularly with the organic continuity, the mutual embeddedness, of affective and cognitive faculties (xxxix–xliii)—but the more basic point of his treatise is what resonates throughout the revivals: conversion, he insists, must be an overpowering affective experience, a knowledge (of God and his grace) arrived at through a fevered intensity of feeling. “He who has no religious affection,” Edwards writes, “is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart” (520). For Edwards and revivalists like him, who had reason to worry over the encroachment of Enlightenment thought and practices, a capacity for strong feeling—the heart’s capacity to be convulsed by God’s omnipotence—is indispensable for any who would aspire to be good Christians. Wheatley, with characteristic dexterity, inherits the evangelical elevation of affect and invests it, as in her poem to the earl of Dartmouth, with explicitly *civic* consequence: in her rendering, impassioned feeling marks not only one’s Christian devotion, but one’s citizenship, one’s fitness for the rigors and obligations of civic belonging.

For Jefferson the Enlightenment statesman, the affective politics of Wheatley’s evangelical religion could not be approved of—but neither, interestingly, could they be utterly discounted, as Jefferson the revolutionary well knew. Indeed, in the complicated distaste Jefferson feels for the “religion” that would “produce” Wheatley, even as he sustains a covert and unacknowledged agreement with her on the affective nature of civic virtue, we begin to see some of the most prominent tensions in Jefferson’s engagement with the whole matter of impassioned feeling in the new republic. On the one hand, Jefferson was a well-known enemy of revivalism, and the untempered “spontaneity, emotionalism, and personalism” that characterized it. Robert A. Ferguson writes of Jefferson’s “obsession” with “secular vigilance against the clergy,” and attributes the “uncompromising vigor” of his stance on this matter to his “total self-confidence in reason, his fear of revivalist excesses, and his correspondingly sharp rejection of

biblical revelation" (74, 73, 77). To Jefferson, then, Wheatley's turn to "feeling hearts" merely underscores her avowed affiliation with the Huntingdon circle and its unhesitating revivalist embrace of affect; what "religion" motivates her, to his mind, smacks of an evangelical revivalism for which he has little use, patience, or respect.

What complicates matters considerably, though, is the fact that Jefferson is himself, at crucial moments, no less an inheritor of the evangelical elevation of affect than Wheatley. Ferguson, for instance, may be right to emphasize Jefferson's "total self-confidence in reason," but he is further from the mark when he refers to Paine's *Common Sense* as the "great exception to the rhetoric of restrained feeling" (113). As we have already seen, it is precisely the note of heightened and aggrieved affect that Jefferson lifts from Paine, and that animates so forcefully his conclusion to the Declaration. Moreover, Jefferson could not have failed to observe that little before the Great Awakening had brought the dispersed colonies into so high a state of self-conscious mutual awareness. As Miller and Heimert note of George Whitefield, "[H]is very presence gave those who heard him a sense of participation in an intercolonial experience."<sup>14</sup> This sense of far-reaching mutuality, of a kind of coherence that might make the unjoined colonies into a "we," is of course exactly what Jefferson is looking for in his draft of the Declaration. In a certain sense, then, the revivalist use of affect, with its "intercolonial" dimension, actually paves the way for Jefferson's subsequent imagining of the nature of American civic cohesion: whatever Jefferson's worries over revivalism—and they were many, and not unwarranted—he nevertheless turns to exactly the register the revivals had brought into prominence, the register of impassioned feeling, when called upon to confront the problem of the new nation's peculiar and largely unprecedented mode of coherence.

The point is not, however, simply to say that Jefferson is hypocritical in his brief fulmination against Wheatley and her religious inspiration. The matter is more complicated still, inasmuch as Jefferson's uneasiness with the "religion" he associates with Wheatley, and with the uses it makes of affect, may have had less to do with his dislike of American revivalism per se, and more to do with the distinct transformations of religious thought unfolding on the *other* side of the Atlantic, in the land of Wheatley's sponsors. Countess Huntingdon certainly seems at the center of an essentially transatlantic coterie, sponsoring missions to America and

influencing men, such as the earl of Dartmouth, who would govern there. But the theological upheavals afoot in England were of a decidedly different order than those of America, even if aspects of what G. J. Barker-Benfield calls eighteenth-century England's "heart religion" (such as its prizing of affect) did cross the Atlantic (65–77). In *The Feminization of American Culture*, for instance, Ann Douglas describes the varied ramifications of the decline in Calvinism in America, a decline she places squarely in the first third of the nineteenth century, and which is characterized, theologically, by a basic transformation in the conception of God: a movement, crudely, from a "supremely *other*," terrorizing, majestic, patriarchal God to a humane, nurturing, loving, infinitely *feeling* God—a God whose first characteristic is his love for humankind (122, 121–30). As Barker-Benfield reminds us, though, exactly this movement—this "debate over the face of God" at whose heart was the matter of "feeling"—is well under way in England as early as the 1740s (70). (A leader in the movement is John Wesley, an early member of the Huntingdon circle, though later cast out.) Douglas famously reads this transformation as a decline in Calvinist rigor, and a movement toward an ever-more pervasive cultural anti-intellectualism—a replacement of the rigor of thought with the complacency of feeling—and it may be precisely that. But such transformations, if he sensed their stirring among Wheatley's sponsors in England, would have unsettled Jefferson for markedly different reasons, and in ways that have much to do with his desire to distinguish Wheatley's turn to "feeling hearts" from his own apparently analogous reliance upon affect and agonizing affections.

If, as Barker-Benfield writes, "[f]eeling is at the heart of the debate over the face of God," then it is the relation of feeling to *obligation*—especially in its civic sense—that is at the heart of the question of the social utility of affect. I have suggested already that, in his turn to an America made whole not by the state but by a specifically affective bond among its dispersed citizens, Jefferson retrieves a strand of nascent nation-language from the Puritan forefathers, and from John Winthrop in particular. By Jefferson's day, revivalists had surely altered the fabric of American religious life and thought, but even a follower of Jonathan Edwards like Joseph Bellamy still had a great deal to do, theologically, with Winthrop. In Bellamy's bracing text of 1750, *True Religion Delineated*, mankind labors under "infinite Obligations" to love God—a God who is, moreover, punishing, unimaginably omnipotent, and under no obligation whatsoever to the loves, supplica-

tions, or wants of humankind.<sup>15</sup> For Winthrop, this infinite obligation to God was essentially the same, and his brilliance as an early political thinker lay in his simultaneous application of that state of infinite obligation to the realm of *civic* life: in his sermon aboard the *Arabella*, it describes the obligation of citizen to citizen, an infinite obligation to the civic body itself which all are required to fulfill, for in the absence of such vigilant mutuality the community will be unable to accomplish its God-appointed duty. For Winthrop, in other words, sustaining one another in the far-reaching mutuality of love was a task to be fulfilled, a *mission*; the labor of it comes not in the sense of mutual interconnectedness to be maintained, but rather in the profound and potentially limitless obligation of citizen to citizen, an obligation that cannot be acquitted with “dissembling” or “dissimulation.”<sup>16</sup> This is what Jefferson has in mind when he speaks of the affective cohesion of the new nation as, precisely, an “endeavor,” a task to be accomplished — it is, we might say, still another part of the theological inheritance of Jefferson’s eminently civic text. For Winthrop and Jefferson both, then, affect is essential to the mutuality that defines a civic body, and mutuality, in turn, presumes obligation.

To conceive of God differently, as the religious thinkers of the Huntingdon circle had begun to do, is necessarily to alter this nexus of elements. Douglas is in some senses devastatingly acute on this point. She asks us to observe how a rhetoric of “feeling” and its productive civic “influence,” which became the hallmark of an evangelical Christianity premised upon a God who obliges humankind with an infinite love, functions in essence as a form of flattering though finally empty compensation to the very members of society — women and the clergy — whose practical utility and power in broader civic life had been monumentally reduced. If Douglas conceives of this movement as a decline it is not least because its flattery of an essentially “feminine” piety and sensibility is also, by design, conspicuously paralyzing: it obliges women, as civic actors, to do little more than *feel*, and indeed renders suspect most any civic participation beyond this narrow perimeter (44–79). We might recall here Harriet Beecher Stowe, who brings *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to a close by reminding her readers that there is, in fact, “one thing that every individual can do, — they can see to it that *they feel right*” (624). The danger in such a formulation, though — which Douglas’s objections begin to suggest — lies in the transformation of the office of *citizen* it might be seen to imply: it is the danger that impassioned feeling, rather



than opening one up to one's potentially infinite obligations to those for whom one feels, might instead come to suffice *as* citizenship, that the mere experiencing of affect itself might stand in for the acquittal of civic obligation. Were Jefferson prescient enough to have sensed a similar transformation in and around the Huntingdon circle—and it is not for nothing that the countess was praisingly mythologized in the 1840s and '50s—his objection might thus have been less to its hollow flattery or its compromised theological rigor than to the slackening of citizenship that its affective politics could be seen to imply. Jefferson's invocation of an affectively bound America may borrow from the revivalism he otherwise disparages, but it has roots as well in a tradition in which the Christian's "infinite Obligations" to a terrifyingly omnipotent God are mirrored in an equally bracing conception of the obligations of citizenship itself. What he could not have countenanced, and what he may have suspected in the Huntingdon circle, was a circumstance in which *mutuality*—affective or otherwise—would somehow be severed from *obligation*, and where civic belonging would in turn carry only the thinnest demands of the citizen.

Such speculation, whatever its plausibility, does not finally make Jefferson's dismissal of Wheatley any less ungenerous, unfair, or unbecomingly prejudiced. Wheatley was not the countess of Huntingdon after all, and it would be capriciously unjust to hang upon her invocation of "feeling hearts" all the burdens and consequences, civic as well as theological, of a sentimental practice which both pre-dates her and comes to flourish well after her untimely death in 1784. Still, the patterns of affinity and disavowal that crisscross the works of Jefferson and Wheatley show us in some detail the ramifying complexities of the question of affect and its place in the civic life of early America. More particularly, they show us some of the difficulties and perplexities involved in the endeavor to imagine for the new nation a kind of coherence, and for its citizens a kind of mutuality, that might prove sustaining. For affect, as I have tried to show, takes its place in early America at the center of what was, crucially, a dream of *fellowship*, of some manner of bond that would make kin of strangers, and in so doing distinguish the American collectivity—as well as the whole of the American project, with its proliferating utopias and endless betrayals—from anything else in the world. It is a model of national belonging by no means peculiar to Jefferson, but one he found particularly useful when drawing up the document that would advertise, before the world,

the American claim to coherence, autonomy, and distinction. That document, with its measured intermixing of languages both mechanistically rationalist and demonstrably affective, reminds us still again that the early American republic was *not*, even for the Enlightenment thinkers whose creation it was, a realm from which impassioned feeling was meant to be expelled. Like many other myths of our founding, this one seems impelled by a too-credulous reading of Federalist reaction.<sup>17</sup> But the voices of Phillis Wheatley and Thomas Jefferson (to name only two) tell a different story of early American civic life. In their story a particular intensity of feeling—an intensity of bereavement—translates into a peculiar kind of mutuality, an attachment to distant others. And it is this far-flung affective mutuality which, for them as for many others to follow, is the stuff and substance of American nationality.

#### NOTES

1. For related accounts, which echo these points in Seltzer and Berlant, see especially Brown, Noble 126–36, and Berlant’s own *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, 1–53, and her introduction, 1–8.
2. I borrow the notion of “carnality” from Dana Luciano’s splendid reading of *Edgar Huntley*. See Luciano, “‘Perverse Nature.’”
3. On rival uses of figures of Native and African Americans in the 1790s, in contests between Federalists and Republicans over national identity, see Gardner 12–17. Winthrop Jordan’s evocation of the early American use of indigenous and African populations is particularly memorable: “[T]hey could not fall,” he writes of early American whites. “[I]ndeed there could be no possibility of their falling, else man was not man and his civilization not civilized. We, therefore, do not lust and destroy; it is someone else. We are not great black bucks of the fields. But a buck *is* loose, his great horns menacing to gore into us with life and destruction. Chain him, either chain him or expel his black shape from our midst, before we realize that he is ourselves” (579).
4. For an important Americanist precursor to the works by Barnes, Ellison, and especially Stern, see Breitwieser. On the English side, an equally important precursor appears in Barker-Benfield. Particularly useful for their complication of the Habermasian ideal of an abstract, disembodied, and wholly rationalist republican public sphere are Burgett and Hendler.
5. The concept of republicanism clearly carries with it a range of meanings beyond those I suggest here, which have primarily to do with the capacity of a given citizen to, in essence, bracket the self: to put aside particular, personal interests and act, therefore, disinterestedly. For an excellent account of the varied meanings of republicanism, particularly in recent historiographic work, see Rodgers.

6. For a very fine reading of the poem as an expression of Wheatley's profoundly ambivalent place in an America whose religion and political ideals she cherished, but which also stole her from her parents and enslaved her, see Bennett 68–69. Bennett's reading is indebted particularly to Erkkila 225–40. On this poem and its relation to “conventions of sensibility,” see Ellison 119–22.
7. For more on the racial aspects of Jefferson's *Notes*, see especially Winthrop Jordan 429–40; Nelson 16–20; and Gardner 17–21.
8. See especially Derrida and, for an excellent account of the “necessitarian context” of the declaration, Fliegelman 140–47. Pertinent here as well is Michael Warner's account of the constitution, which follows from Derrida's observations about the Declaration of Independence (97–117); and Christopher Looby's comments about the Declaration and what Derrida refers to as its “fabulous retroactivity” (23, 21–26). To these critics, Jefferson's strategy is to depend upon the authority of utterance—for Warner, following Derrida, the disembodied authority inherent in print; for Fliegelman and Looby the embodied authority of voice—in the place of a nation or republic, on behalf of whose already-constituted existence he might be authorized to speak. My own account differs from these in that I suggest that, in the account Jefferson offers, the nation *is* already consolidated—there is a specifically *affective* coherence animating the populace—prior to the writing of the document; as we shall see, it is this affectively constituted nation, this collectivity of citizens linked in their “agonizing affection” over the troubles with England, which authorizes the creation of an independent state.  
 For a different account of Jefferson's text, as a document concerned with problems other than those of national unity, see Wills, *Inventing America*. Wills's interesting claim, with which I differ here, is that our vision of Jefferson as the great unifier of the unruly colonies is essentially an inheritance from Lincoln and his eloquent, idealized view of the Declaration.
9. All subsequent quotations from Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence will be taken from his account of it in his *Autobiography*, as produced in *Writings* 19–24.
10. In Benedict Anderson's terms, Jefferson's sense that a manner of affective mutuality lends coherence to the new republic is part of what qualifies America, from the moment of its inception, as a distinctively *modern* nation: Anderson writes, in particular, of “that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of the modern nation” (36). What Anderson describes as a state of *confidence of community in anonymity*, I would suggest, was for many writers of Jefferson's era—and many more following him—most aptly conceived in specifically affective terms, as a state of emotional attachment or being-in-relation to the strangers who share one's republic. For a related account of America's national origins, see Lipset.
11. On the extent of Selina Hastings, the countess of Huntingdon's patronage of Wheatley, see Richmond 24–26, 33–36; Robinson 75, 306; and Mason, Jr. 183–86.
12. Precisely for her strident evangelism and feminine piety, the countess was a popular subject for biographies in the mid-nineteenth century. See Foster and

- Knight, as well as Mullett v-xxiv. For a more recent scholarly biography, see Schlentler.
13. On the "visionary language of evangelical Protestantism" and its affordances to Wheatley's political project, see Erkkila 237, 233-39.
  14. "Whitefield's self-advertisements," they write, "made the progress of the revival in each area common knowledge everywhere, and his very person gave those who heard him a sense of participation in an intercolonial experience. Moreover, awareness of the breadth of the Awakening stimulated an interest in what was thought and said elsewhere that caused the revival dialogue to span, almost from the first, nearly the whole of British America" (xxxv-xxxvi).
  15. Bellamy writes, "[T]he same infinite Obligations which we are under to love God above our selves; even the same infinite Obligations are we under, to live to God ultimately, and not to our selves" (13).
  16. Greil Marcus suggests something similar when he reads Winthrop's invocation of the "Citty vpon a Hill" as simultaneously inspiring and caustic, as "a warning, as a prophecy of self-betrayal. The depth of the possible betrayal measures the breadth of the possible achievement" (209).
  17. On myths of America's founding and misreadings of Federalism, see Wills, *A Necessary Evil*, 57-122.

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