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### **'The master and the man must change places for a season': Untangling Historical Narratives of Race and Loyalty in 'The Spy,'**

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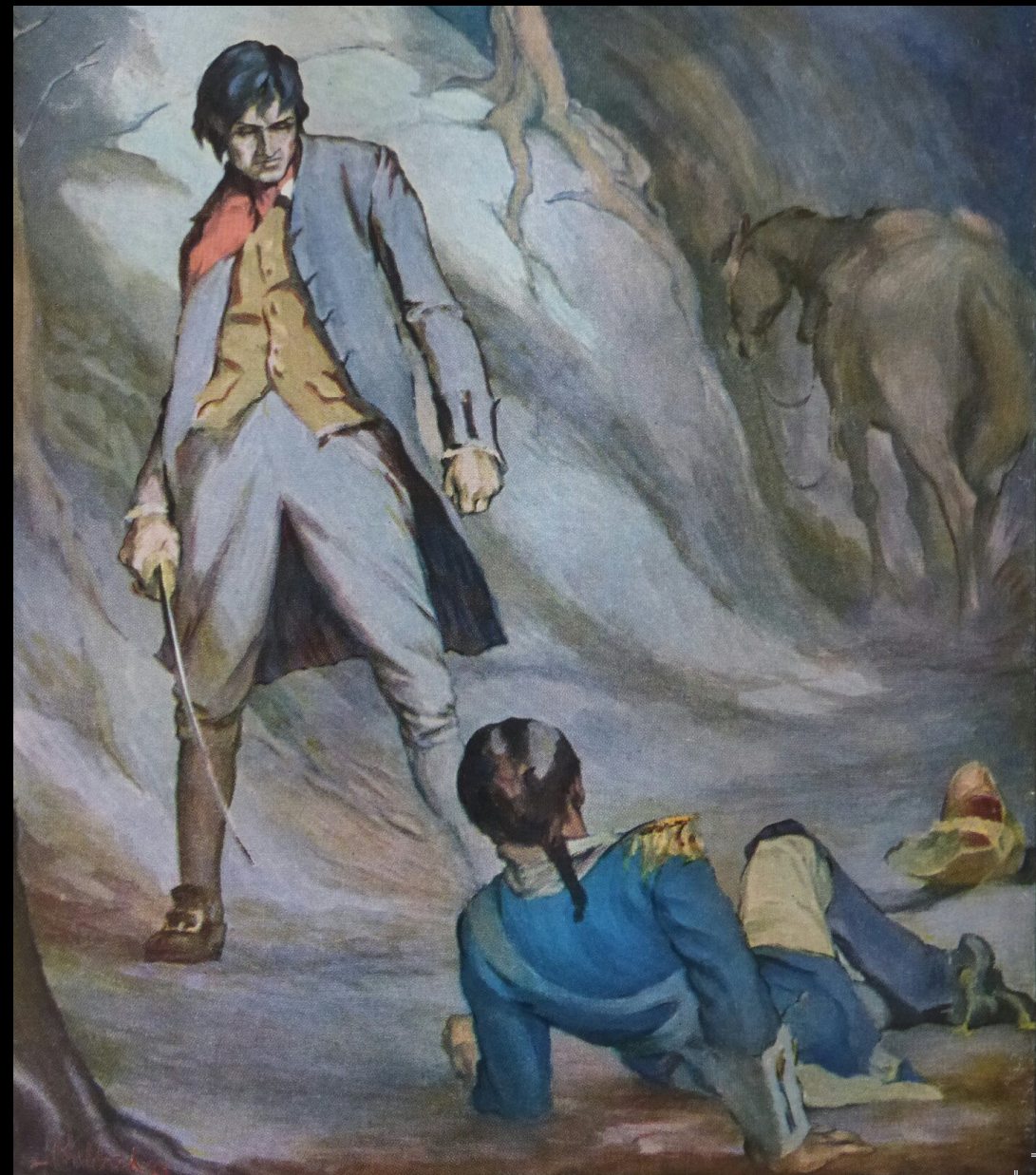
*The Spy* at 200: Special Anniversary Issue



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Front Cover Image: [Harvey Birch and Captain Lawton] by Cyrus LeRoy Baldridge (1889-1977) from the illustrated edition of *The Spy* published by Minton, Balch, & Co. in 1924. Public domain.

Back Cover Image: [Harvey Birch Hiding] by Harold Mathews Brett (1880-1955) from the illustrated edition of *The Spy* published by Houghton Mifflin as part of the Riverside Bookshelf in 1924. Public domain.

Illustrations throughout this issue sample from the rich history of illustrated editions and artwork based on incidents in *The Spy*. For more, see Steven P. Harthorn, "Illustrated Editions of Cooper's *The Spy*: A Survey," *James Fenimore Cooper Society Journal* 27.1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 6-12, [jffcoopersociety.org/articles/ALA/2016ala-harthorn.html](http://jffcoopersociety.org/articles/ALA/2016ala-harthorn.html).

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Frontispiece illustration by F.O.C. Darley for the W.A. Townsend  
edition of *The Spy*, 1859.

# **“The master and the man must change places for a season”: Untangling Historical Narratives of Race and Loyalty in *The Spy***

By David N. Gellman (DePauw University)

“The master and the man must change places for a season,” declares Harvey Birch as he orchestrates the rescue of the young American-born British officer, Captain Henry Wharton, from being ignobly hanged as a spy. This bit of philosophical prose-poetry quickly gives way to the urgent work at hand—transforming a young white officer into the likeness of his family’s elderly Black slave Caesar Thompson. Thus, Birch, a spy whose loyalty to the cause of American independence ran so deep that he accepts a life of obloquy rather than reveal his deep cover, cajoles master and man to play along with his life-saving, race-changing hoax. Birch expertly assembles his materials, including a “mask...stuffed and shaped in such a manner as to preserve the peculiarities, as well as the colour, of the African visage” and a “wig...so artfully formed of black and white wool” that Caesar, despite earlier objecting to “such a lip” on the mask, approves. Birch instructs Caesar, who is to be left behind in the guarded tent wearing Wharton’s clothes and a wig, that under no circumstances is he to speak “or you will betray all.” Although Caesar’s actual identity is soon discovered, the scheme holds up long enough for Wharton to escape the noose his patriot captors prepare for him.<sup>1</sup>

The scene of racial imposture comes at a pivotal moment in the narrative. Absent the successful race-switching ruse, the plot would take a very different course, with the consequence that Birch’s covert heroics on behalf of the Revolution would be swallowed up by a story of a family tragically coming to terms with what would have been Captain Wharton’s death. Instead, Birch and Caesar save Wharton, so that Birch’s selflessness can play out against the background of the family’s and the nation’s future.

*The Spy*, published at the very end of 1821, was one of the first American novels to take on the Revolutionary War as its primary and explicit subject matter. Its success touched off a boom in American historical novel-writing. Much of this effusion focused on the era of the founding, a thematic landscape rich in possibility.<sup>2</sup> The novel explores themes of character, self-sacrifice, honor, and duty, as well as façades worn and identities threatened in the revolutionary crucible. Yet even Cooper scholars specifically charting these themes skip past Caesar’s crucial role.<sup>3</sup> Caesar’s role in this story of false fronts and

negotiated identities merits further investigation because Cooper's construction of the new nation's racialized history through the character of Caesar bears a problematic relationship to actual events and real people.<sup>4</sup> Cooper's racial and historical sleight-of-hand sanitized the role of Black resistance in the actual revolutionary struggle while contributing to the racialized imagery of his own time.<sup>5</sup>

The view that *The Spy* provides on Cooper's ideas about slavery, race, and emancipation sharpens further when we consider the racial politics at the time he wrote the novel in combination with his relationship to the Jay family. The Jay family's slaveholding and their abolitionism place Caesar's masquerade in a new light. It has long been known that reminiscences shared with Cooper by John Jay, retired New York revolutionary politician and prominent founding father, played a crucial role in priming Cooper's imagination to write the novel.<sup>6</sup> Connections between the Jays and Cooper, however, run far deeper—with specific implications for the meanings Cooper assigned to the Caesar character and even the novel more generally. Cooper's friendship with William Jay, John Jay's second son, began in childhood. He also would develop a friendship with John Jay's older son Peter Augustus Jay. Cooper lived not far from John Jay's older brother, Peter Jay.<sup>7</sup> The Jay family, which mixed a history of slaveholding with a commitment to gradual emancipation, owned an enslaved man named Caesar, later acquiring the full name Caesar Valentine.

This essay suggests that it is plausible that Cooper modeled, at least in part, his character Caesar on the Caesar who served the Jays.<sup>8</sup> But if the use of the name Caesar in the novel was mere coincidence, the juxtaposition of the biography of the historical Caesar Valentine and Cooper's fictional Caesar Thompson still underscores Cooper's effacement of African American initiative in the nation's revolutionary past and his ignorance of their aspirations in the 1810s and 1820s. *The Spy* was published in the same year that the Missouri Crisis over slavery and citizenship drew to a close and that produced a New York State constitution drawing a sharp distinction between Black and white voters. The commitment of the Jay family to Black emancipation and Black citizenship contrasts markedly with *The Spy*'s deep skepticism that there was room for free Black people even in a world where northern slavery, Cooper anticipated, would become a fading memory.<sup>9</sup>

Cooper's pivotal scene of temporarily exchanged racial identities masks the complicated allegiances forged by the enslaved, by freed people, and by their white allies during the age of revolution that was coming to an end at the time he published the novel. The stereotypes



he etched into his Caesar character would continue to resonate in the popular culture, obscuring more complex histories.<sup>10</sup> The literary and cultural paths forged by *The Spy* emerged from Cooper's selective perception of African Americans in his midst and of events with menacing implications for African American status in the nineteenth-century U.S.

The character Caesar Thompson embodies loyalty in a novel all about the paradoxical claims of revolutionary-era loyalty. In Westchester County, irregular paramilitaries—the Cow-boys and Skinners—loosely affiliated with the armies sought advantage in the strategic stretch of land between British-occupied New York City and the lower Hudson River Valley. Violence and uncertainty marked the lives of the hard-pressed inhabitants of Westchester County.<sup>11</sup> In this “neutral ground,” loyalty and duty came under pressure from many directions, making it an ideal setting for Cooper to explore themes of character, sacrifice, and the making of painfully difficult decisions about personal honor and national duty.<sup>12</sup>

In some respects, Caesar's identity is almost wholly absorbed into that of his master, Captain Wharton. The pivotal scene in which he facilitates his master's escape advances physical and verbal racial stereotypes even as Caesar embodies unconditional loyalty.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Caesar is prepared and well-suited to make the switch plotted by Birch because his ego has largely been subsumed already. Caesar's loyalty also disposes him toward unambiguous identification with the crown—to the point that he turns a blind eye to the Cow-Boys, who roamed the neutral ground committing depredations in the king's name.<sup>14</sup>

Caesar's devotion to the British stays constant even though the family he serves is divided, with one daughter sympathetic to the patriots, the other to the crown, the father neutral, and the son serving the British. Exposure to real combat puts Caesar in his place. He quickly ducks for cover when bullets fly. Cooper's portrayals of physical cowardice are made with simple comic gestures and facile condescension rather than a sympathetic recognition that this vulnerable figure might have experienced actual physical abuse or known others who did. Caesar's teeth chatter when he thinks he is in the presence of ghosts or real physical danger.<sup>15</sup>

Although Caesar does not view all whites as his superiors, the limits of his ability to defend himself against racial slights are clearly marked. When, early in the novel, Birch, whom Caesar finds contemptible because he appears to be a mere peddler, casually refers in Caesar's presence to “the niggars to the south,” the enslaved man

responds, “No more nigger than be yourself, Mister Birch.” But then Caesar’s mistress, Sarah Wharton, seeks to calm him: “Hush, Caesar—hush—never mind it now,” said Sarah Wharton soothingly....” Her gentle commands to the enslaved Black man rather than the free white man shows how limited his range of action is. Caesar fully understands this, as his response reveals: “A black man so good as white, Miss Sally...so long as he behave heself.”<sup>16</sup>

While some scholars have highlighted the fact that Caesar’s speaking up is a sign of Cooper’s awareness of Black self-assertion in the age of northern emancipation, Caesar clearly poses no threat to white authority. His reading of the situation speaks more loudly than his complaint.<sup>17</sup> In the pivotal identity-swapping scene described at the beginning of this essay, Caesar “grumbled” about Birch’s comment that Caesar must not talk, replying to Birch’s warning, “I s’pose Harvey tink a color’d man an’t got a tongue like oder folk[.]” But, as the narrator points out, “he took the station assigned to him” all the same. He does so out of loyalty to Henry Wharton and because he has no other choice. His “station” is “assigned to him” no less in the ruse than in his everyday existence. Moreover, his very reply, marked by his distinctive accent—“s’pose,” “tink,” “oder folk”—makes precisely Birch’s point. The disguise cannot mask his tell-tale dialect that marks him off from the white speakers.<sup>18</sup>

Thematically, Caesar functions as a foil for his verbal antagonist, the peddler-spy Birch, rather than for Capt. Wharton, for whom he briefly masquerades. Both Birch the spy and Caesar the slave don disguises in the service of a greater cause. Birch never discloses his true patriotic identity, even decades after the war. Birch’s secret identity is set up as a product of choices he has made; he even selflessly declines to accept a fee for his services. Caesar’s very status is defined by his lack of any claim to monetary compensation.<sup>19</sup> Both Birch and Caesar take risks to rescue a loyalist officer, Capt. Wharton—Birch upholding the larger nobility of the patriot commitment to a just war, Caesar out of a deeply engrained personal loyalty.<sup>20</sup> Cooper identifies Caesar as “man” to Wharton’s “master,” but it is Birch, not Caesar, who achieves full manhood through self-effacing acts which express a complex, but deeply felt set of patriotic commitments.<sup>21</sup>

Caesar’s very name represents a case of mistaken identity, with the entire slave society in on the joke; this Caesar is master of no one, not even himself, devoid of ambition, destined to serve and follow, never to lead. Cooper expresses some ambivalence about the cultural jest and how much he should shield Caesar from scorn. The narrator

proclaims shortly after the slave is introduced into the plot that the name Caesar is “in mockery of his degraded state,” not in mockery of the man himself. Commenting on Caesar’s physical limitations, the narrator assures the reader “the heart of Caesar Thompson was in the right place, and, we doubt not, of very just dimensions.”<sup>22</sup>

Yet, later in the novel, when Cooper might celebrate Caesar’s heart, he instead literally uses Caesar’s head and its contents as a punch line. Henry Wharton and Caesar Thompson pull off the racial masquerade long enough to effect the white man’s rescue. But Caesar’s cover is soon blown, leading to a rough interrogation. As the patriot dragoons leave him behind in order that they may give chase to Wharton and Birch, Caesar assesses his wounds. The narrator closes the chapter with the racist aside, “Happily for himself, he had alighted on his head, and consequently sustained no material damage.”<sup>23</sup> That Caesar, who aided and abetted a treasonous getaway, undergoes no further examination, let alone a trial for treason further confirms that the actions of a slave have no political meaning, or at least none for which he can be held responsible.

In general, Cooper’s Caesar takes a simple view of even the larger question of the origins of the institution that defines and degrades him. In tell-tale dialect found in the anti-Black public satire of the era and the stock humor of published anecdotes about Black people common for at least a generation previous to Cooper’s novel, he cautions a white servant about the dangers of curiosity: “dere much mischief come of curiosity. If dere had nebber been a man curious to see Africa, dere would be no colour people out of deir own country.” Even the evils of the slave trade provide a lesson in humility for subordinated people.<sup>24</sup> Cooper’s portrayal of Caesar trades on stereotypes similar to the sharply racist “bobalition” broadsides of the early nineteenth century, satires of Black men donning military-style uniforms and parading through northern city streets to celebrate critical events like the U.S. withdrawal from the international slave trade.<sup>25</sup> For Cooper as for his contemporary “bobalition” race-baiters, Black men simply cannot disguise their inferiority by dressing like their alleged social and racial betters. Attempts to address the single vitally important social facts—slavery and freedom—provoke contempt dressed in racist humor. Cooper and the “bobalition” broadsides, moreover, prefigure blackface minstrelsy stage performance.<sup>26</sup>

Far from limiting himself to dismissively racist humor when contemplating Black slavery and Black emancipation, Cooper also used his Caesar character as a springboard for direct commentary on the

consequences of emancipation at the time of the novel's composition. These reflections make clear Cooper's skepticism that Black people were suited for freedom at precisely the moment in history when New York, the northern state most deeply enmeshed in domestic slavery at the time of the Revolution, was moving toward a final legal abolition of the practice.<sup>27</sup> In three separate extended passages, the narrator ruminates on race during the revolutionary conflict and in the half-century since the revolution.

Early in the novel, the narrator clears up some confusion that he imagines Caesar's laudable character might occasion for the reader:

The race of blacks of which Caesar was a favourable specimen is becoming very rare. The old family servant, who, born and reared in the dwelling of his master, identified himself with the welfare of those whom it was his lot to serve, is giving place in every direction to that vagrant class which has sprung up within the last thirty years, and whose members roam through the country unfettered by principles, and uninfluenced by attachments. For it is one of the curses of slavery, that its victims become incompetent to the attributes of a freeman.<sup>28</sup>

Blacks, Cooper-as-narrator asserts, were well suited for service, but the institution had warped the character of former bondspeople. Emancipation did not make them truly free, let alone equal to whites. Perhaps subsequent generations could outrun this curse, but in the context of Cooper's other commentary in the novel, this does not seem to be what he expected.<sup>29</sup>

To be sure, Cooper recognizes in his novel that some sort of emancipation was necessary to vindicate the American cause. Thus, Cooper inserts a substantial dialogue in which a patriot, in the form of Doctor Sitgreaves, is challenged to defend the American cause against the charge of hypocrisy for bemoaning British supposed political enslavement of the colonists while perpetuating literal enslavement of Africans and their descendants. Sitgreaves answers his English interlocutor by mapping out the new nation's future: "doubtless, as we advance, the manumission of our slaves will accompany us, until happily these fair regions shall exist, without a single image of the Creator that is held" in bondage. Cooper the narrator praises Sitgreaves as prophetic, implicitly foreshadowing such legislation as New York's 1799 gradual emancipation law and, more to the point, New York's 1817 law which declared an end to slavery in the state as of July 4, 1827. Sitgreaves's prediction, of course, only works in the "fair regions" of the mid-Atlantic and New England, where it could at

least be argued that various forms of abolition resolved the paradox of slaveholding colonies waging a revolution under the banner of “all men are created equal.”<sup>30</sup>

Cooper, however, as the end of the novel makes clear, would just as soon conjure Black freedom out of existence. As noted, early in the novel, he indicated that slavery ruined the ability of the formerly enslaved to function as free people. In the final chapter, American slavery and ongoing anti-Black racism make one last appearance. The nephew of Capt. Henry Wharton fortuitously encounters the now-quite-aged Birch near Niagara Falls during the War of 1812. The young Capt. Wharton Dunwoodie recounts that his mother Frances, after marrying the dashing patriot officer Peyton Dunwoodie, moved to Virginia, bringing Caesar with her. The young Capt. Dunwoodie recalled that Caesar helped his Uncle Henry “in some difficulty that occurred in the old war” and that “his mother always speaks of him [Caesar] with great affection.” And, true to his identification with his owner, Caesar “died the same year with his master,” Frances’s elderly father.<sup>31</sup>

Dunwoodie’s clouded memory, given Caesar’s crucial role in the plot, is revealing. The ideal slave, the ideal northern slave, is one of whom memory fades. This passage serves as a counterpart, one of a pair of bookends, to Cooper’s introduction of Caesar at the beginning of the novel as a vanishing type. The memory of the white-face/black-face identity swap is lost, as is any notion of true equality in accordance with the revolution’s egalitarian principles. Cooper, in essence, asks: Who, in 1814 or 1821, would believe that a Black man and a white man deliberately exchanged places to safeguard the life of the innocent—if politically misguided—white man? As for the future of slavery itself, the fruits of gradual manumission that Dr. Sitgreaves prophetically promised, clearly those only grew in a northern vineyard. In order to live his life to the end as an ego-subordinating slave, Caesar had, in terms of the novel’s epilogue, to move to Virginia, a more appropriate resting place for a man of his dying, disappearing kind because he could live out the balance of his life as a slave rather than as an allegedly problematic free man.<sup>32</sup> While Cooper engaged in a bit of wish fulfillment, he also, alarmingly if unintentionally, provided a domesticated description of the process by which an untold but large number of Black northerners were shipped—illegally—to the slave South as a way of extracting value out of human property before the lengthy process of northern abolition finished playing out.<sup>33</sup>

Remarkably, Cooper’s comments anticipated the speeches of the delegates to New York’s 1821 Constitutional Convention as they also



cast an eye across the historical landscape to determine whether the revolutionary past required future racial equality in New York, the North, and the nation. I say *anticipated* because, with the exception of the climactic Henry Wharton-Caesar Thompson identity swap, all the scenes and comments on slavery and race were written before the New York convention took up the issues of slavery and the voting rights of Black men.<sup>34</sup> A proposal to confirm the process of gradual emancipation, well underway in New York by 1821, prompted one delegate to note “that this resolution would turn slaves out of the warm kitchens of the farmers, where they had lived comfortably, to perish in hovels.” Col. Samuel Young of Saratoga County shared the same judgment as Cooper about free Blacks, albeit even more bluntly and with a more explicitly political purpose of denying free Black men the vote: “At present emancipate and protect them; but withhold that privilege which they will inevitably abuse. Look to your jails and penitentiaries. By whom are they filled? By the very race, whom it is now proposed to cloth with the power of deciding upon your political rights.”<sup>35</sup> Like Cooper’s Dr. Sitgreaves, the delegates to the Convention viewed the abolition of slavery in the North as inevitable. Like Cooper, they denied equal citizenship would or should follow.

Even some of those prominent members of the Convention with a record of advocating on behalf of African American freedom were, like Cooper’s narrator, more inclined to quietly usher the memory of slavery and Black agency from view. Rufus King, who had played a leading role in the battle against admitting Missouri as a slave state, argued that New York’s state constitution should make no mention of slavery so that “it may hereafter be forgotten that slavery once existed in the state.”<sup>36</sup> Daniel D. Tompkins, who as governor of the state in 1817 had successfully persuaded the legislature to fix July 4, 1827 as the end of slavery in New York, shared Cooper’s assumption about free Blacks, labelling them as “a class confessedly degraded, ignorant and vicious.” He juxtaposed white veterans of the War of 1812 “who shed...blood in the defense of your soil” with allegedly unworthy African Americans.<sup>37</sup> Cooper tapped into the spirit of the times in New York and elsewhere in the North and the upper South, which had turned hostile to Black citizenship—including voting rights exercised by Black men.<sup>38</sup>

Not everyone at the 1821 Convention was willing to so readily repudiate the egalitarian racial implications of the revolution. Most notably, Peter Augustus Jay, John Jay’s eldest son, vociferously protested disfranchisement as betraying “the spirit of our institutions.”

As everyone at the convention knew, free Black men possessed the right to vote in New York at the time of the convention. Republican Party-backed laws in the 1810s had made it more difficult for Blacks to vote, not to deny them the ballot outright like some at the 1821 convention sought to do.<sup>39</sup> Like Cooper, Young, and others, Peter Augustus Jay conceded that Blacks often found themselves unequipped for freedom. But his own observations made him see the future in very different, far less racist terms. Jay asserted the “state of things is fast passing away” and that schools set up for free Blacks revealed “a thirst for instruction, and a progress in learning, seldom to be seen in the other schools of this state.” Jay’s hopes for an improvement in white attitudes was equally sanguine, as he noted “with the diminution of slavery, the prejudice [against Blacks] has already diminished, and, when slavery shall be no longer known among us,” prejudice “will perhaps disappear.”<sup>40</sup> Jay highlighted the “progress” of a rising generation of African Americans at the same moment that Cooper was finishing up a novel suggesting that the slave past and allegedly inherent deficiencies unsuited them for freedom, expressing nostalgia for the likes of the humble, ever-loyal Caesar Thompson.

The sharp contrast between Peter Augustus Jay and Cooper is crucial for understanding the particular alchemy of *The Spy* with regard to race and revolutionary memory, as well as highlighting divergent understandings of gradual emancipation’s purposes and prospects in a country wrestling with the institution’s national future. Jay’s remarks barely scratch the surface of how his very prominent founding father and their extended family experienced Black resistance and Black loyalty during the long transition to abolition. Ironies and interconnections abound.

The intimacy of the Jays and the Coopers spans generations. James Fenimore Cooper’s father William was a key frontier supporter and advocate of the New York Federalist Party for which John Jay served as standard bearer. Their sons William and James together attended St. Peter’s Rectory in Albany before moving on to Yale College; they formed a friendship during their adolescence that lasted a lifetime. Peter Augustus Jay, William’s older brother, was, in addition to being Cooper’s friend, his attorney in a bitter financial dispute that came to a head in the mid-1820s. Although the Jays had a far stronger hold than the Coopers on elite status within the interlocking New York worlds of wealth, political influence, and genealogy, the families’ spheres overlapped substantially. As a family friend, Cooper trusted the Jays enough to present the manuscript for his first, less successful

novel *Precision* to the Jay clan at the Jay home in Bedford, New York. The Jays encouraged him to continue writing. When Cooper decided to write a second novel, he recalled the story of clandestine heroism that John Jay had shared with him, probably in 1817, on the Bedford homestead's piazza.<sup>41</sup>

Socializing between the Coopers and the Jays brought Cooper in contact with Jay family African American servants, including Caesar Valentine. Cooper's eldest daughter recalls her youthful visits with "Auntie Jay" the widow of John Jay's older brother Peter who lived in nearby Rye, New York: "We often drank tea with 'Auntie Jay'; there were several lovely old blacks in the kitchen, 'Caesar,' and 'Venus,' and 'Lily,' with whom we were on the most affectionate terms." These encounters occurred sometime between 1813 and 1822.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, Cooper did not have to rely on his contacts with the Jays for observational material on enslaved New Yorkers; his wife's own Westchester County family, the DeLanceys, had slaves and former slaves in their household. Moreover, Cooper's father, despite his Quaker background, held slaves in the family's Cooperstown seat, and James himself took over from one of his brothers the indenture of a free Black servant in 1811.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, the intimacy between the two families and the source of the novel in John Jay's conversation with Cooper suggests that it may have been more than mere coincidence that *The Spy's* major Black character—Caesar—bears the same first name as one of the Jay family's long-serving slaves.

Although the biography of Caesar Valentine is sketchy at best and filled with gaps, the difference between the fictional and the real Caesar reveal the limits of Cooper's imagination and characterization. In the fall of 1797, John Jay, serving as governor of New York, found himself at wit's end and looking to rid himself of a recalcitrant slave named Caesar. Writing his son Peter Augustus from Albany in early October, John complained that Caesar was "noisy and grumbling—so much so that the neighbours must have noticed it" despite, the governor claimed, the family's good treatment of him. Wrote Governor Jay: "I cannot readily account for his Behaviour on any Principle" other than the malign influence of some unknown person. Dispatching Caesar to Peter Augustus, John placed the matters in his twenty-three-year-old son's hands: "keep him" or "sell him, and with the money buy another." Caesar, for the time being at least, remained in Peter's service, begging, Peter claimed, not to be sold.<sup>44</sup>

Sometime in 1798, however, Caesar departed the Jays, presumably running away, and became a sailor. Caesar's ship landed in Cape

François, St. Domingue, right in the thick of Toussaint L'Ouverture's revolutionary war to secure freedom for the French sugar colony's huge enslaved population. Caesar reported to the Jays via another Black man that he had been seized "& is now a Drummer in Toussaint's Army" where, Peter relayed to his father, "he is very ill used, & extremely desirous to return to me." Governor Jay responded from Albany with "pity" and thought that providing the American consulate in St. Domingue with "an application supported by proper Documents, might...be made with some prospect of success."<sup>45</sup>

The non-fictional Caesar's actions and attitude contrast sharply with Cooper's Caesar, even though once drafted into a genuine Black revolutionary movement, the real Caesar found himself miserable enough to appeal to his former masters for rescue. Rather than comfortably submit to his lot in life or subordinate his ego to one of the leading statesmen of the day, the Jays' Caesar tested a governor's personal authority to—and even beyond—the breaking point. For his part, Caesar expressed his dissatisfaction in word and action. As a slave and as a person, he fully experienced the tensions produced by his identity, while the fictional Caesar effaced his own, never moving from ineffectual complaint to concrete resistance.

Moreover, the real Caesar's encounter, however unintentional, with the great Black-led revolutionary movement of the era reminds us that Cooper's broader portrait of Black loyalism during the American Revolution was a deep distortion. Westchester County provides ample evidence of Black initiative. An estimated two-thirds of slaves in Westchester, or well over two thousand, may have run away from their masters during the war. The British occupation of Manhattan and sweeps through the neutral ground of pro-British irregulars provided the enslaved with opportunities to flee from their bondage. Cooper's character Caesar Thompson's pro-British sentiments provide the faintest hint of what Black support for the British actually involved.<sup>46</sup> African Americans were more likely to find their freedom during the Anglo-American conflict with the loyalists rather than the patriots, in part because the British promised freedom to the enslaved who abandoned their patriot masters and crossed British lines. Such loyalty to the crown was anything but passive or self-effacing. Blacks actively joined the British efforts in the Hudson Valley, serving in a combat capacity, as well as bearers of news and as agents helping both blacks and white loyalists to make it to British lines. Indeed, as historian Graham Hodges has shown, neutral ground territories, in particular northern New Jersey, proved to be an irresistible target for African

Americans serving the British military to exact revenge against their former masters.<sup>47</sup>

Even more obscured in Cooper's representation is the significant presence of African Americans amongst American patriot forces in the patriot war effort. Emblematic of Black participation is the estimate of one eyewitness that a quarter of patriot forces at Yorktown were African Americans.<sup>48</sup> The Hudson Valley campaigns saw the participation of Black patriot troops as well. Black patriot troops suffered casualties at the hands of one of Cooper's future DeLancey in-laws in May 1781. An enslaved man named Pompey Lamb used his role peddling food to British troops to provide key intelligence to patriot general Anthony Wayne that allowed his troops to storm the British Hudson River redoubt at Stony Point. Cooper's Harvey Birch had a real-life Black counterpart.<sup>49</sup>

The role of African Americans includes an event that is directly related to the genesis of *The Spy*, the apprehension and ultimate execution of Major John André. James Peterson, a free man of Black ancestry from Westchester County, played a critical, albeit "unsung" role in the André affair. André, patriot-turned-traitor Benedict Arnold's British handler, was seized by three Westchester County men and turned over to George Washington as he traversed the neutral ground. Peterson, a member of the militia, had fired a cannon at the British ship that, unbeknownst to the patriots, was waiting to ferry André to safety after his surreptitious meeting with Arnold.<sup>50</sup> It was the controversy that arose in 1817 over the petition of one of André's captors for a federal pension that likely prompted John Jay to share the story with Cooper of espionage in the neutral ground. Indeed, Cooper refers to André's fate early in his novel.<sup>51</sup>

Cooper's narrative and characterization did little to suggest the possibility of autonomous Black action in *The Spy*. Like Cooper's Caesar, Blacks donned the uniforms also worn by white soldiers, but not out of blind, self-denying loyalty. The reflex that the conflict inspired was not to maintain old attachments, but to actively seek new opportunities for freedom in a radically changed and charged environment.<sup>52</sup>

The Caesar who served various members of the Jay family in the nineteenth century, first as a slave and later for wages, may have appeared on the outside to more closely approximate the humble loyalty of Cooper's Caesar Thompson. But details jump out to paint a far more complex and interesting portrait.<sup>53</sup> He served John Jay's older brother Peter, who was blind, on the family's Rye, New York estate. In the summer of 1810, Caesar struck and killed a belligerent "vagrant"



who refused to leave the house after a niece of Peter's wife had fed the man.<sup>54</sup> Caesar's willingness to defend his masters' home and niece against an intruder certainly indicates a loyalty that may be compared to the fictional Caesar's faithfulness. But the blow he struck does not find a parallel in the physical cowardice and quick retreats into submissiveness exhibited by Cooper's character.

Caesar Valentine's assertiveness in defense of his masters' house did not mean, however, that his loyalty to his masters could be taken for granted. Indeed, during the spring and summer of 1811, Peter Augustus Jay reported to his father and to his sister Maria that his Uncle Peter was losing control of his slaves, specifically Caesar and a man named Peet. Apparently, Uncle Peter had not changed with the times, the era of gradual emancipation calling for greater leniency and accommodation. At least that is how Peter Augustus, an active member of the New-York Manumission Society, saw matters.<sup>55</sup> John Jay's analysis of the situation in Rye was that his blind septuagenarian should encourage Caesar toward cooperativeness by offering him wages. The retired patriot leader was perhaps prompted more by pragmatism than principle. Replacing the long-time enslaved servants with new ones seemed unlikely. Once Caesar and others were gone, new kinds of arrangements would have to be made.<sup>56</sup> In any event, Caesar surely realized that he had leverage in the situation.

Cooper's comments in *The Spy* about the disappearance of "[t]he race of blacks" who "identified...with the welfare of those whom it was" their "lot to serve" would seem to have some echo on the Rye estate.<sup>57</sup> But Peter Augustus Jay and his father John Jay did not invoke the old ways with nostalgia; instead, their assessment of change involved not so much a slave's sense of loyalty as the means by which that loyalty might be commanded. Caesar and Peet, far from showing themselves, in Cooper's words "incompetent to the attributes of" freemen, were beginning to manifest those very attributes—refusing to take orders and likely, at least in Caesar's case, to respond to financial incentives to ensure his steady service.<sup>58</sup>

The long denouement of Caesar Valentine's story further suggests how Cooper's vision of Black slavery and freedom in *The Spy* approximated and yet simplified the way the domestic drama of emancipation might play out, especially in the households of New York's elite. When his blind master, Peter Jay, died in 1813, his widow Mary Duyckinck Jay, the "Auntie Jay" whom Susan Cooper fondly remembered, inherited ownership of the people he held as slaves. She manumitted Peet (who subsequently changed his name to Peter

Johnson) with the expectation he continue to work for her during her lifetime. She did not manumit Caesar, however, until her own death in 1824, when she also bequeathed him \$50 in her will.<sup>59</sup>

Unlike Cooper's fictional Caesar Thompson, who was removed from New York entirely and "died the same year with his master," Caesar Valentine outlived his masters, with the death of the last one leading to his freedom. Caesar then entered the service of Peter Augustus Jay, who took possession of the original Jay family homestead in Rye once his Aunt Mary passed away. The final acknowledgement of his lengthy service came in 1843. In his will Peter Augustus Jay bequeathed "to Caesar Valentine, a Black man long a servant in my family an annuity of forty eight dollars a year during his life" along with a "request my children not to let him suffer if through age or infirmity he should be unable to support himself with comfort."<sup>60</sup>

The temptation to fit Caesar Valentine too neatly into Cooper's narrative framework should be resisted. The long attachment to the Jays reflects how few options Valentine felt freedom presented, and, at any rate, should not be separated from the rest of his life's story. Cooper, of course, would not have known at the time he wrote *The Spy* just how long the connection between the Jays and Caesar Valentine would run. But taken on its own, Valentine's story further suggests that loyalty, resistance, and ambiguous connection could not be buried or so easily consigned to oblivion as Cooper indicated through the Virginia death of Caesar and his master. Cooper's fictional Caesar lacked the depth and pathos revealed even in the outline of Caesar Valentine's life—which followed a tortuous path from resistance, to repatriation, to faithfulness.<sup>61</sup> Cooper declined to imagine a Caesar who outlived his master, let alone one who lived in freedom in the North.

While composing *The Spy*, had Cooper cared to look beyond the limited options of loyal domesticity or improvident vagrancy, he would have found a variety of African American efforts to construct a durable foundation of freedom as the house of slavery precipitously decayed in post-1800 New York. As Michael Warner and others have demonstrated, the African Grove Theater that premiered just as Cooper was finishing *The Spy* was one of the most dramatic instances of Black cultural confidence and explicit rejection of racist stereotyping in early national New York.<sup>62</sup> Numerous churches, mutual aid societies, and entrepreneurial and political endeavors emerged, particularly in New York City. In these expressions of initiative, free African Americans simultaneously sought to meet

communal needs while keeping an eye on a future in which slavery, but not the descendants of slaves, would disappear.<sup>63</sup>

Cooper need not have become a careful observer of free Black life to be aware of the political implications of his observations about race, revolution, and emancipation. Peter Augustus Jay and his cousin Peter Jay Munro each served as President of the New-York Manumission Society during the 1810s. That organization operated the impressive African Free School in New York City, lobbied the state legislature for legal reforms, and combatted kidnapping and other abuses of Black New Yorkers. Peter Augustus Jay and his venerable father John Jay publicly opposed the admission of Missouri as a slave state. William Jay, Cooper's school chum, privately fumed not only over slavery in Missouri but also the proposed scheme to exclude free Blacks from entering the new state.<sup>64</sup> And, as previously mentioned, Peter Augustus Jay eloquently protested plans at the New York State constitutional convention to deprive free Black men of the vote. In his novel portraying the birth of a nation, Cooper's vision of the racial future diverged sharply from that of the family who helped him to launch his tale of revolutionary espionage. The novelist chose not to imagine truly emancipatory alternatives.

Even so, Cooper's friendship with the Jays continued, but their correspondence sometimes revealed widening ideological fault lines. In the midst of the developing crisis over South Carolina's disdain for federal tariff laws, Cooper expressed to Peter Augustus Jay sympathy for the states' rights position, which was as much about slavery as tax rates. He asked Peter to place himself in the shoes of white southerners who bitterly resented northern hectoring over slavery.<sup>65</sup> Cooper, needless to say, did not ask Peter to place himself in the position of South Carolina's enslaved who produce the wealth and power which white Carolinians were so zealous to preserve. William Jay, writing Cooper about the ongoing crises a year-and-a-half later, tried to get his old friend to see sectional discord from a different perspective. If the South insisted on making northerners their "enemies," war would follow, during which "the Slaves will assert their rights." The desire of the enslaved themselves for liberty was natural; as he put it to Cooper, "What think you—are these Slaves to be the only portion of the human race that are for ever to be denied the rights of humanity?"<sup>66</sup> The season during which the African Americans threatened to seize their identity as free people would be perpetual as long as the injustice of slavery continued.

Episodes of slavery-provoked sectional crisis shadowed *The Spy* from its origins to its subsequently published editions. Cooper's narrative took its drama from the deep domestic divisions provoked by the Revolutionary War. But the novelist continued to emphasize the imperatives of national unity—a unity that implicitly required avoiding that kind of serious reckoning with slavery. In a preface of *The Spy* that Cooper originally wrote in 1831, amid the nullification crisis, and that he revised in 1849, amid an emerging crisis over states carved from the territory the U.S. bought at gunpoint from Mexico, Cooper alluded to the conversation with John Jay that launched the novel. He and the great man had discussed the “purifying consequences of a love of country” during a war for independence that “had many of the features of a civil war.” The nascent nation not only survived that conflict but, as he reflected in 1849, had matured into a mighty power whose army had humbled Mexico. Now, Cooper commented, the only “enemy” the nation faced was internal division. He concluded optimistically, “there is much reason to hope that the same Providence which has so well aided us in our infancy, may continue to smile on our manhood.”<sup>67</sup> To realize that hope, the problem of slavery would have to be masked, if not repressed entirely. That proved impossible for reasons people like William Jay understood far better than Cooper. In America's next civil war, Caesar Thompson's and Caesar Valentine's successors would don revolutionary uniforms in a conflict that exploded Cooper's anticipation of providence-sanctioned American unity and his fictions about race, revolution, and emancipation.

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### Notes

1. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821; New York: Penguin, 1997), 332-340, 398; quotations, 332, 333, 334.
2. Michael Kammen, *A Season of Youth: The American Revolution and the Historical Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 24, 130, 148, 149, 154, 183; James P. Elliott, “Historical Introduction” to James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* (1821; New York: AMS Press, 2002), xiii; George Dekker and John P. McWilliams, *Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage* (Boston: Routledge, 1973), 2, and W.H. Gardiner, *North American Review* 15 (1822), excerpted therein, 55-66; James Franklin Beard, “Cooper and the

Revolutionary Mythos,” *Early American Literature* 11 (1976): 84-104. Wayne Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper: The Early Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), offers a definitive biographical account of Cooper’s rise and powerfully articulates the case for his significance to the business and the art of novel writing in the United States. See also, William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: Harper and Row Torchbooks, 1961), 101-102.

3. Charles Hansford Adams, “*The Guardian of the Law*”: *Authority and Identity in James Fenimore Cooper* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1990), focuses his commentary on *The Spy* on masks, laws, and identity, and yet, makes absolutely no mention of Caesar, slavery, race, and this racial identity swapping scene; Adams likely took his cue from John P. McWilliams, Jr., *Political Justice in a Republic: James Fenimore Cooper’s America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 53. Benjamin Cooper, *Veteran Americans: Literature and Citizenship from Revolution to Reconstruction* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 61-62, 67, engages Caesar only in passing in this regard; Kay Seymour House, *Cooper’s Americans* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1959), 73-91 devotes a chapter to race and Cooper’s Black characters, including Caesar, but does not explore the masking scene and theme; see also Wayne Franklin, *The New World of James Fenimore Cooper* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 27, 174.

4. Alan Taylor, *William Cooper’s Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage, 1995), sets the standard for interpreting Cooper’s novels through a historical lens.

5. Michael Warner and his graduate students, in a brief “coda” to their 2002 essay on race and the public sphere in New York, make the connection between the Caesar-Wharton exchange and the theme of disguise in *The Spy*; they only begin to speculate about what Caesar’s character might mean for the novel and the historical contexts in which Cooper worked. Wayne Franklin credits Cooper with a greater racial sensitivity than either the text or the context merits. Michael Warner, et. al., “A Soliloquy ‘Lately Spoken at the African Theater’: Race and the Public Sphere in New York City, 1821,” in Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2005), 263-266; Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 150-151, 638-639 n. 44.

6. Cooper, *The Spy*, 4-5; Wayne Franklin, “Introduction” to *The Spy* (1997 edition cited in n. 1), xvi-xviii, xxii; Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 277-285; Elliott, “Historical Introduction,” xvii-xviii. Jack Kligerman, “Notes on Cooper’s Debt to John Jay,” *American Literature* 41 (1969): 415-419; *The Selected Papers of John Jay: Volume 1, 1760-1779*, ed. Elizabeth M. Nuxoll (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 347-349; Taylor, *Cooper’s Town*, 408.

7. Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 44-48, 145, 181, 241-242, 246, 247, 450, 452, 462-465, 483, 518. The Coopers and Jays were also related by marriage. Beard, “Cooper and the Revolutionary Mythos,” 86, 95; Franklin, “Introduction,” xvi; John Jay [1875-1928], *Memorials of Peter A. Jay: Compiled for his Descendants* (Printed for private circulation, 1929), 119-120, 132, 149-150; Susan Fenimore Cooper, “Small Family Memories,” in *Correspondence of James*



*Fenimore Cooper*, ed. James Fenimore Cooper (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 1:29-30, 36, 39-40; and letters cited therein—Cooper to Caroline DeLancey, Dec. 3, 1831, 1:248; Nov. 1833, 1:327 (Peter A. Jay second name listed on committee welcoming Cooper back to the U.S.); Cooper to John Jay II, June 16, 1837, 1:375-376; William Jay to Cooper, July 15, 1843, 2:499-500; Taylor, *Cooper's Town*, 143-144, 167-169, 339-340.

8. The Caesar-Cooper connection was indicated to me several years ago by Eda Burne and Anne Silliman, both of the Jay Heritage Center, Rye, New York; see also, Jay Heritage Center, [jayheritagecenter.org/land-ownership-residents/](http://jayheritagecenter.org/land-ownership-residents/) (accessed August 19, 2021).

9. Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), emphasizes the effacement of slavery's memory in antebellum New England.

10. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975) established the paradigm and the periodization. Paul J. Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality: America's First Abolitionists* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), provides an invaluable set of new insights; see also the early chapters of Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). On resonance of racism in the novel, see Warner, "A Soliloquy," 265-266; House, *Cooper's Americans*, 73; William Taylor, *Cavaliers and Yankees*, 102, 300-304, does not give sufficient emphasis to Cooper for anticipating trends in racial characterization that post-date *The Spy*.

11. Sung Bok Kim, "The Limits of Politicization in the American Revolution: The Experience of Westchester County, New York," *Journal of American History* 80 (1993), 868-889; Jacob Judd, "Westchester County," and Thomas S. Wermuth, "The Central Hudson Valley: Dutchess, Orange, and Ulster Counties," in *The Other New York: The American Revolution beyond New York City, 1763-1787*, ed. Joseph S. Tiedemann and Eugene R. Fingerhut (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 106-154; A.J. Williams-Myers, "Out of the Shadows: African Descendants-Revolutionary Combatants in The Hudson River Valley; A Preliminary Historical Sketch," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 31 (2007): 91, 97.

12. Erik Simpson, *Mercenaries in British and American Literature: Writing, Fighting, and Marrying for Money* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 138; Adams, *Guardian of the Law*, 28-29, 37-42; McWilliams, *Political Justice*, 58, 64; Kammen, *Season of Youth*, 181; Robert E. Cray, Jr., "Major John André and the Three Captors: Class Dynamics and Revolutionary Memory Wars in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997), 371-397, esp. 376.

13. Simpson, *Mercenaries*, 138-140.

14. Cooper, *The Spy*, 21.

15. Cooper, *The Spy*, 85, 92, 132-133.

16. Cooper, *The Spy*, 37.

17. Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 151, and House, *Cooper's Americans*, 74-75.

18. Cooper, *The Spy*, 334; Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard

University Press, 1990), 13, 16-17, lays out the theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between the spoken word, print, and status. For an example of mocking deployment of parodied dialect published during the war itself, see Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 24.

19. Cooper, *The Spy*, 397-398; Simpson, *Mercenaries*, 134-135, 138-139, 146.

20. See Beard, "Cooper and the Revolutionary Mythos," 90, on the oddity of Cooper's fictional Washington also conspiring to liberate a loyalist officer.

21. On Birch, patriotism, justice, and disguise, see McWilliams, *Political Justice*, 48-64, 159; and Adams, *Guardian of the Law*, 32, 36, 38, 40.

22. Cooper, *The Spy*, 20, 42; Simpson, *Mercenaries*, 139-140. Gary B. Nash, "Forging Freedom: The Emancipation Experience in the Northern Seaport Cities, 1775-1820," *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1983), 20-27, noted that such classical names as Caesar disappeared from the free Black community fairly rapidly as emancipation took hold.

23. Cooper, *The Spy*, 340.

24. Cooper, *The Spy*, quotation 126, see also 39, 85, 133, 172; David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 102-129, reviews the theoretical and political implications of Black-voiced dialect.

25. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 163-209, esp. 171-183; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 328-342; Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 96-121; Shane White, "It Was a Proud Day': African American Festivals in the North, 1741-1834," *Journal of American History* 81 (1994), 13-50.

26. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); see also, Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Warner, "A Soliloquy," 265-268.

27. Gellman, *Emancipating New York*.

28. Cooper, *The Spy*, 40; Simpson, *Mercenaries*, 139, cites this same passage on the "impending obsolescence" of free Blacks, but does not pursue its implications for the history of northern emancipation; see also House, *Cooper's Americans*, 81-82.

29. House, *Cooper's Americans*, 73-91, provides a dated survey on Cooper, slavery, and race.

30. Cooper, *The Spy*, 168-169. Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Vintage, 1997), 146-7; Robert E. Spiller, ed., "Documents: Fenimore Cooper's Defense of Slave-Owning America," *American Historical Review* 35 (1930), 575-582, reprints Cooper at length on slavery, including northern abolition and its aftermath.

31. Cooper, *The Spy*, 404.

32. This motif of fading races will, of course, remind readers of *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826); see Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 81-106.; see also, Simpson, *Mercenaries*, 139, 145. Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 3, 214-215, 220-225, 229, explores at length willful cultural “amnesia” in New England in the wake of gradual abolition.

33. Indeed, one of the stated reasons for accelerating the gradual abolition process in 1817 was this problem of illegal transport of slaves southward. See Gellman, *Emancipation New York*, 204-205; Claudia Dale Goldin, “The Economics of Emancipation,” *Journal of Economic History* 33 (1973): 70; Robert William Fogel and Stanley Engerman, “Philanthropy at Bargain Prices: Notes on the Economics of Gradual Emancipation,” *Journal of Legal Studies* 3 (1974), 392-393; *Freedom’s Journal*, July 13, 1827. It is also worth noting that in shipping Caesar south to resolve the plot, Cooper makes no mention at all that earlier in the story Caesar had a wife named Dinah (Cooper, *The Spy*, 84, 164). Her fate, her very existence, simply goes unmentioned in Cooper’s epilogue. Long ago, Winthrop D. Jordan, *Black over White: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968; New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), 512-541, 546-569, described various white notions about the disappearance or removal of Blacks from American society. The subject of colonization—the removal of African Americans from U.S. society to some distant place, usually Africa—has undergone some historical revision in recent years: see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Vintage, 2014), Chapters 3-6. House, *Cooper’s Americans*, 82, indicates that Cooper was a colonizationist.

34. Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 271-277, carefully reconstructs the timing of the novel’s composition. As Warner, “A Soliloquy,” 241-244, highlights, the drumbeat was struck for Black disfranchisement in Mordecai Noah’s New York City newspaper the *National Advocate* on August 3, 1821, before the convention met and was enmeshed in a broader discourse over Blacks in public life, especially the ice cream garden that would soon give rise to a popular, and thus controversial, Black theater company. See Warner, “A Soliloquy,” esp. 263-268, and Franklin, 638-639 n. 44 for a response to Warner on whether Cooper drew any inspiration from the African theater controversy in constructing the scene of Wharton’s escape in blackface mask.

35. *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877*, ed. David N. Gellman and David Quigley (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 125, 196.

36. *Jim Crow New York*, 194-198; King quoted on 198; on King, see Joseph L. Arbena, “Politics or Principle? Rufus King and the Opposition to Slavery, 1785-1825,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 101 (1965): 56-77. The theme of forgetting the slave past is taken up extensively in Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, Chapter 6.

37. *Jim Crow New York*, 157.

38. Van Gosse, “In the Woodpile: Negro Electors in the First Reconstruction,” in *Revolutions and Reconstructions: Black Politics in the Long*

*Nineteenth Century*, ed. Van Gosse and David Waldstriecker (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 66-83.

39. Sarah Gronningsater, "Expressly Recognized by Our Election Laws': Certificates of Freedom and the Multiple Fates of Black Citizenship in the Early Republic." *WMQ*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, 75 (2018): 465-506; Paul J. Polgar, "Whenever They Judge it Expedient': The Politics of Partisanship and Free Black Voting Rights in Early National New York." *American Nineteenth Century History*, 12 (2011): 1-23; *Jim Crow New York*, 64-66.

40. *Jim Crow New York*, 113, 142, 179. Unfortunately, the best that Jay could do was to forestall a complete disfranchisement of Black voters; instead, the delegates affixed to Black voters the very same property-holding requirement for Black men that they had removed as barrier to white male suffrage at this very same convention. And even Peter A. Jay, in 1821, who "professed himself to be zealous in the cause of emancipation" declared that "[t]he cause of humanity would gain nothing" by advancing the date of Black liberation forward from its scheduled 1827 arrival (*Jim Crow New York*, 196).

41. See note 6 above and Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 44-45, 181, 237, 241, 242, 247, 251, 283-285, 450, 452, 463-465, 483, 486-487, 518, 581 n. 45; Taylor, *Cooper's Town*, 407-408.

42. Susan Cooper describes these visits as occurring after Mary D. Jay was widowed in 1813; Cooper moved his family to New York City in 1822. Susan Cooper, *Correspondence*, 29-31; Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 251, 283; Franklin, "Introduction," xii.

43. Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 21, 150-151, 576-577 n. 28-29; Taylor, *Cooper's Town*, 144, 299-300, 379, 395, 402.

44. John Jay to Peter A. Jay, Oct. 2, 1797, Jay Family Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Peter A. Jay to Maria Jay Banyer, Oct. 8, 1797, typescript excerpted from Columbia University Libraries Manuscript Collections, held at John Jay Homestead State Historic Site, Katonah, New York; Peter A. Jay to John Jay, Oct. 24, 1797, The Papers of John Jay—Online Edition, [www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/jay/](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/jay/) (hereafter PJJ), doc. 06058. One first encounters Caesar in the Jay family records in January 1797, when Peter, then twenty-one, reported from New York City to his father, then the governor, that "Caesar as yet seems pleased and attentive" (Peter A. Jay to John Jay, Jan. 9, 1797, PJJ. doc 06056). Jan Horton, "Listening to Clarinda," unpublished manuscript for the John Jay Homestead Historic Site provides an insightful discussion the slavery and the Jay family; on Caesar's discipline problems see 87-88. Daniel C. Littlefield, "John Jay, the Revolutionary Generation, and Slavery," *New York History* 81 (2000): 91-132, has also reviewed Jay's record on slavery as a slaveholder.

45. Peter A. Jay to John Jay, Feb. 22, 1800; John Jay to Peter A. Jay, Mar. 3, 1800, PJJ, docs. 11459, 13348.

46. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 248; Judd, "Westchester County," 119.

47. Williams-Myers, "Out of the Shadows"; Graham Russell Hodges, "Black Revolt in New York and the Neutral Zone," in *New York in the Age of the Constitution, 1775-1800*, ed. Paul A. Gilje and William Pencak (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), 21-40; Graham Russell Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 139-153; James W. St. G. Walker, "Blacks as American Loyalists: The Slave's War for Independence," *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 2 (1975): 51-67.

48. Henry Wiencek, *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 243-247; Cooper, *Veteran Americans*, 81.

49. Williams-Myers, "Out of the Shadows," 97-98.

50. Williams-Myers, "Out of the Shadows," 97, 108 n. 31.

51. Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 277-285; Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, 102; Cooper, *The Spy*, 29; Simpson, *Mercenaries*, 134, 149; Cooper, *Veteran Americans*, 62-63, 66-67.

52. Although I am unconvinced by the connections she makes between African-American service and the "democratization of memory," *Sealed with Blood*, 2, 23, 24, 46, 52, 55-56, 70, 76-77, 104, 191, 208-209, also may be consulted; Cooper, *Veteran Americans*, 69. Key entries in the vast and growing literature on the enslaved during the revolution are: Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution* (New York: Ecco, 2006), and Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

53. It is possible that the Caesar who appears in the record after 1810 is not the same Caesar who the Jays tried to rescue, but references to Caesar's volatility and his long service taken up in the following paragraphs support the inference that it is the same man.

54. Peter A. Jay to Maria Jay Banyer, July 6, 1810, PJJ, doc. 90194.

55. Peter Augustus Jay to John Jay, April 5, 1811, Peter Augustus Jay to Maria Jay Banyer, Aug. 1, 1811, PJJ, docs. 06155, 90199

56. John Jay to Peter Augustus Jay, Oct. 24, 1811; Peter Augustus Jay to Maria Jay Banyer, July 6, 1810, PJJ, docs. 11525, 90194,

57. Cooper, *Spy*, 41; Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 151, lauds, too generously, Cooper's perceptions of the ambiguities of race relations during this era of gradual emancipation.

58. Cooper, it should be noted, may have had knowledge of the recalcitrance and loyalty of slaves and servants enslaved in his father William Cooper's household: see *William Cooper's Town*, 299-300, 379, 504 n. 13; Franklin, *James Fenimore Cooper*, 576-578 n. 29.

59. Peter Augustus Jay to John Jay, Oct. 22, 1813, PJJ, doc. 06186. Transcription of Overseers of the Poor records, Rye, New York, Jan. 14, 1814, copy provided to author by Jay Heritage Society, Rye, New York; Last Will and Testament of Peter Jay of Rye, originally signed September 21, 1797, last codicil added July 2, 1813; Last Will and Testament of Mary D. Jay, scans of transcriptions, John Jay Homestead; scan of transcription of manumission

and certification of manumission by overseers of the poor, June 2, 1824, Jay Heritage Center, Rye, New York.

60. Will of Peter Augustus Jay, scanned copy of handwritten will provided to author by John Jay Homestead.

61. Gardiner's 1822 review, reproduced in *Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage*, 64, criticized Cooper for the lack of "pathos" in the novel, not mentioning Caesar.

62. Warner et. al., "A Soliloquy 'Lately Spoken'"; Shane White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Marvin McAllister, *White People Do Not Know How to Behave at Entertainments Designed for Ladies and Gentlemen of Colour: William Brown's African and American Theater* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

63. Hodges, *Root & Branch*; Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). Another sign of the changing cultural landscape of freedom was the decline of classical names such as Caesar and Cato, as well as African-derived names such as Cuffee and Quashy, to be replaced with English names and family surnames see Nash, "Forging Freedom," 20-27; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 239-240.

64. William Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, 101. See David N. Gellman, "Sharing the Founders' Flame: John Jay, Missouri, and Memory," in *A Fire Bell in the Past: The Missouri Crisis at 200—Volume 1: Western Slavery, National Impasse* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2021), 321-343, on the Jays specifically, and the book more broadly for the latest scholarship on the Missouri Crisis.

65. James Fenimore Cooper to Peter Augustus Jay, July 15, 1830, PJJ, doc. 10292. On Cooper and slavery more broadly, see James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat* (1838; New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 171-176; Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* (New York: Amistad, 2005), 159-160; Max L. Griffin, "Cooper's Attitude Toward the South," *Studies in Philology* 48 (1951), 67-76; and Spiller, ed., "Fenimore Cooper's Defense."

66. WJ to Cooper, Dec.11, 1832, in Cooper, *Correspondence*, 1:301-4. For background, see Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 374-379.

67. Cooper, *The Spy*, 3, 7; see also, Cooper, *Veteran Americans*, 77, 78.



“May I beg to examine the quality of that wig?” [Captain Lawton penetrates Henry Wharton’s disguise.] Frontispiece illustration by Daniel Maclise and Charles Marr from the Bentley’s Standard Novels edition of *The Spy*, 1831.