PART I

RACE AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

1

Notes on the Virginia Capitol

Nation, Race, and Slavery in Jefferson's America

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While visiting Richmond, Virginia, in 1796, newly immigrated British architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe painted two watercolors of the state's new capitol building. In translucent hues, one of the watercolors depicted the stately white temple in the distance, sitting nobly atop Shockoe Hill, overlooking the town's sparsely populated pastoral landscape (figure 1.1). One of the earliest examples of American civic architecture, the capitol building, which had been completed in 1788, was designed by statesman, architect, planter, and slave owner Thomas Jefferson and modeled in part on the Maison Carrée, a first-century Roman temple in Nimês, France. In 1776, twenty years before Latrobe's visit, Virginia had drafted and ratified its state constitution, of which Jefferson had been a key author; the document established a separation of powers that would go on to become a model for the organization of the federal government. The new building Jefferson envisioned in 1776 to house Virginia's governmental functions needed both to symbolize and to enable the power of "the people" to govern and adjudicate the laws of the new state. The self-trained architect also intended the neoclassical state capitol to serve as a model for civic architecture throughout the thirteen states, as well as in the yet-to-be determined seat of the federal government.

Fig. 1.1 *View of the City of Richmond from the Bank of the James River* (1798) by Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.

It is critical that we understand how "the people" of Virginia—and by extension "the people" of the United States of America—were identified and defined during this period of revolutionary action and postrevolutionary planning; it is important to trace the various rationales conceived to identify who made up "the people" of Virginia, and by extension "the people" of the United States of America. In other words, who were Virginians or American citizens, endowed with constitutional rights, and who were not? A survey of the population of the port town of Richmond reveals the racial contours of this division. The city's white residents, who were America's newly minted citizenry, staffed and served in its government seat; patronized its taverns, shops, stables, and inns; profited from its docks along the James River and from its warehouses trading in tobacco and slaves; and lived in the wood-framed houses shown in the foreground of Latrobe's watercolor. Among the several thousand white Americans living in Virginia in the late eighteenth century labored an almost equally numerous population of noncitizens—free and enslaved African men, women, and children. The enslaved served their masters and mistresses to produce the region's great wealth. A depiction of this slave economy can be found among a later series of watercolors Latrobe produced during travels north to Fredericksburg, Virginia. One scene documents a white overseer keeping

Fig. 1.2 *An Overseer Doing His Duty near Fredericksburg, Virginia* (1798), by Benjamin Henry Latrobe. Courtesy of Maryland Historical Society.

dutiful watch over two enslaved women who, with hoes raised in midair, cleared the burnt remains of a forest for either cultivation or new construction (figure 1.2). Chattel slavery—believed by some to be a necessary evil—buttressed America's civilized values of freedom, liberty, and equality.

It is critical to consider that enslaved black people, humans classified as property, built several of the nation's most important civic buildings: the Virginia State Capitol, the White House, and the U.S. Capitol. Designed by white architects, these edifices stand as the Enlightenment's monuments to the power of reason and the virtues of equality, justice, and freedom. One astute deliberation on the moral peril of slavery, still tempered by belief in the natural inferiority of the Negro's mind and body, can be found in Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), a lengthy compendium of the state's geography, geology, wildlife, human inhabitants, and political economy. Jefferson wrote and revised *Notes on the State of Virginia* during the same years that he designed Virginia's capitol building. If the capitol were to physically represent the institution of state governance, *Notes on the State of Virginia* was a kind of philosophical natural history addressed in part to a European audience and attesting to the geographic and political fitness of the region.

Born into the wealthy European planter class of colonial Virginia, Jefferson epitomized the consummate humanist polymath. Because his oeuvre encompasses the aesthetic and technical domain of architecture, the political realm of government, and the rational sphere of natural philosophy and history, his works offer an ideal lens through which to understand the intersections of the emerging discourses of architecture, nationalism, and racial difference as they coalesced in the late eighteenth century. Analyzing Jefferson's architecture and his writings, together with correspondence from this period, broadens our understanding of the social, economic, cultural, and political context in which the first work of American civic architecture—the Virginia State Capitol—was conceived and realized. By expanding the types of archival materials accessed to not only include architectural drawings, but also letters and scientific treatises, I analyze the productive relationship between democratic ideals and racial difference. I explore how the ontological and epistemological ground for the racialized citizen/noncitizen dynamic is one structured conceptually, physically, and spatially by the earliest American civic buildings and the contexts in which they were built.

Race, Reason, and Architecture

Scholars who have written about Jefferson's designs for the Virginia State Capitol—including the architectural historians Fiske Kimball and Frederick D. Nichols—have failed to examine in depth chattel slavery's connection to the building's conception, construction, or context. Slavery was not simply an odious institution rooted in the remote confines of southern backwoods plantations. In truth it was integral to the formation of the economy, government, and national character of the United States. To be sure, many people recognized the enslavement of "Negroes," to use a term common during the period, to be undeniably contrary to the nation's founding creed: the "self-evident" truth that "all men are created equal." That equality originated in nature and that equality was necessary for liberty were moral principles Jefferson enshrined in the Declaration of Independence (1776). There is, however, an inherent contradiction—some might argue a disavowal—in how the founding fathers constituted a new nation that ensured liberalism's "unalienable rights" to "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," while continuing to violently enslave other human beings for personal gain.

With nationalism growing in the West in the closing decades of the eighteenth century, Europeans continued to conceptualize the racial paradigm of human difference that had emerged from centuries of contact with and colonial expansion into Asia, Africa, and the New World. During the Revolutionary period and shortly thereafter, "race" had not yet been categorized in the hierarchical terms of biological variations and evolution as would happen under the disciplines of modern science in the mid-nineteenth century. Natural philosophers and historians of

this period, among them Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried Herder, Comte de Buffon, and Thomas Jefferson, debated the meaning of the human species's observable physiognomic variations (outer character) and perceived mental distinctions, such as temperaments and humors (inner character). Their observations and experimentations sought to uncover the laws—climatic or geographic—that governed differentiation in the human species across the globe. In *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764), Kant, for example, scrutinized the "national character" to be observed in the Negro:

> The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world.[1]

Kant and other such men of letters placed European "man" in a position of superiority above the other races, by virtue of the aesthetic perfection of white skin and the capacity to reason, evident in the ability to comprehend the law and to appreciate beauty.[2]

For theorist Sylvia Wynter this overdetermined European mode of being human, "man," evolved in two phases. The first period, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century, charted the decline of belief in divine and magical causation and witnessed the rise of the physical sciences that sought to understand the natural forces that animated the world, replacing the belief that the biblical curse of Ham, for example, had colored Africans black. During the second period, from the eighteenth century onward, the biological sciences developed; these demonstrated that nature's own laws were behind natural forces. It was through this rational framework that race came to be considered as biologically determined.[3] This invented "man" was for Wynter "made possible only on the basis of the dynamics of a colonizer/colonized relation that the West was to discursively constitute and empirically institutionalize on the islands of the Caribbean and, later, on the mainland of the Americas."[4] The resulting forms of racial patriarchy nominated white males as the bearers of power and the symbolic subjects of modernity, while simultaneously dismissing other epistemological frameworks as archaic and devaluing other ways of being human. Europe, as Wynter and others have written, invented race as an instrument of domination.[5]

As the West shifted from a Judeo-Christian cosmology of heavens and the earth to a humanist worldview, philosophers deployed universal reason to imagine a

self-determined and self-conscious moral subject—political man—who perceived and conceived "the nature of things," including his social relations.[6] Natural rights became foundational for new social formations—nation states—whose governments, guided by historically derived ideas of democracy, ensured freedom for their citizens. At the same time, Europeans also invented the category "Others of Europe," to borrow Denise Ferreira da Silva's term, to describe those who were not modern, not rational, not free, not white, and not citizens. These subhumans, often feminized as weak and submissive, labored in the colonies and dwelled in yet-to-be-charted territories.[7] Europeans consigned nonwhite people, with their supposedly tenuous moral and physical character, to the bottom of the repurposed Great Chain of Being. Natural historians and scientists developed representations of time and space in the emerging discourses of history and science that placed nonwhite people in prehistory and in regions unexplored on colonial maps. The rendering of nonwhite people as primitive and uncivilized in turn rationalized the conquest of their territories, the expropriation of their land and labor, and the elimination of their lives by war or disease. The "Others of Europe's" racial inferiority, particularly their lack of culture in white European eyes, dialectically elevated and affirmed the universal man and whiteness as the ideal representations of the human in the West's own imagination.[8]

It is important to keep in mind that from the fifteenth century onward, secular reason also had an impact on European "arts of building," on building's transformation from a medieval trade guild to the modern discipline of architecture.[9] With the rise of academies and learned societies, architectural treatises circulated debates on the appropriate use of architecture, proportions of classical elements, and the ideal configuration of different building types. New techniques of geometry and cartography influenced modes of architectural representation. A growing interest in mechanics, documented at length in dictionaries and encyclopedias, advanced new construction methods that separated architecture from engineering. In other arenas, natural philosophers explored man's capacity for aesthetic judgment to assess which ideal forms were visually pleasing. The taxonomic methods used by natural historians to discern speciation, in particular racial differences, were applied to the study of the historical transformation of buildings to determine character and organization. To begin to chart a history of architecture, scholars made comparative archeological, ethnographic, and aesthetic evaluations of how far Europe's architecture had advanced beyond the rest of the world's ancient and primitive building practices.

These technical and aesthetic developments gave rise to the figure of the modern architect. At first self-taught elites like Jefferson, but eventually European apprentice-trained architects like Latrobe, were employed by the state and private citizens to design the government buildings, offices, banks, customhouses, store-

houses, libraries, museums, prisons, great houses, and plantations that symbolized regimes of power and organized the territorial dynamic between the metropole and colony. Jefferson's designs for the Virginia State Capitol reveal the mutually constitutive relationship between race, reason, and architecture.

A Perfect Morsel of Good Taste

In 1776, Jefferson proposed a bill to the Virginia House of Delegates to move its state capital from Williamsburg, the colonial seat since 1699, to Richmond, a fledgling settlement farther up the James River. The bill was passed by the House of Delegates in 1779 shortly before Jefferson became governor of Virginia, a post he held for two years.[10] Richmond would be more centrally accessible to the state's citizens and representatives, safe from enemy incursion, and navigable by waterway.[11]

Home to a wealthy planter class who eagerly sought independence in stewarding their own affairs, Virginia was one of the most powerful and prosperous of the thirteen colonies. The growing ranks of landed English farmers began assembling larger tracts of fertile territory in the late 1600s for the cultivation of the colony's main cash crop and export, tobacco. This territorial expansion, a system of land privatization enabled by patents and headrights awarded by the crown, further encroached upon the lands of indigenous peoples—the tribes of the Powhatan confederacy—and pushed them westward into the lands of the Monacan and Manahoac peoples. By the time the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia to declare independence from the Great Britain in July 1776, Virginia's free white population had grown substantially, along with its population of enslaved black workers. The latter had been purchased and imported as a labor force to tend the tobacco fields, and unlike indentured European laborers, could be held in perpetuity.

The bill to move the capital from Williamsburg to Richmond laid out a plan for the new seat of government. Jefferson's scheme for the civic district of Richmond subdivided blocks into plots, which were sold at auction. Jefferson drew up the first designs for the Virginia State Capitol in 1776, the same year that he drafted the state constitution, and revised them from 1779 to 1780.[12] In Jefferson's estimation, to adequately house Virginia's growing white constituency and government, construction practices needed to evolve beyond the production of the crude, ugly wooden structures and awkwardly proportioned brick buildings that were found in Williamsburg. "Architecture," he lamented, "seems to have shed its maledictions over this land."[13] Brick and stone were proper materials for building because of their longevity, he rationalized. However, Virginia lacked craftsmen and workmen trained to draw and execute correctly the classical orders of entablatures, pediments, and columns. This lack of skilled labor was perhaps an outcome of the

fact that one segment of the construction workforce was enslaved. Literacy, especially the ability to write, was discouraged among the enslaved in order to maintain subjugation and suppress revolt.

All the components of the new republic—executive, legislative, judicial—were accounted for in Jefferson's bill and in his initial drawings of the state capitol that placed each branch in its own building on Shockoe Hill. Jefferson possessed several key folios of Palladio and other volumes on Greek and Roman antiquities. He had experimented with Palladian neoclassicism at Monticello, his plantation house under construction in the Piedmont, and in unbuilt designs for his alma mater, the College of William and Mary.[14] For the state capitol, Jefferson placed the House of Delegates and other offices on the lower level. The senate chambers, associated clerks, and other legislative functions were located on the upper level.[15] Astutely aware of architecture's ability to project the longevity and stability of the state, Jefferson believed that the new capitol and courthouse buildings should be "built in a handsome manner with walls of Brick, or stone and Porticos."[16] A neoclassical exterior that echoed the architecture and ideals of Roman republicanism and Athenian democracy would best speak to the new country's values of liberty and justice.

In 1784, Jefferson succeeded Benjamin Franklin as the minister plenipotentiary to France, a post he held for five years. During his diplomatic assignment in Paris, where he lived with his two daughters, along with several enslaved Africans he had brought along to tend to their needs, Jefferson was charged with finally completing the plans for the Virginia capitol once the land on Shockoe Hill had been claimed by eminent domain.[17] In summer of 1785, two of the state government's directors of public buildings—James Buchanan and William Hay—sent revised plans of the capitol's foundations to Jefferson to review as a means of quelling discontent in the state legislature over the choice of the building's site. Buchanan and Hay's pragmatic scheme—a series of rooms divided by a long central hallway—lacked the aesthetic vision of Jefferson's skillful plans. Governor Patrick Henry wrote to Jefferson in the late summer of 1785 that a cornerstone had been laid and that foundations of brick, their construction overseen by Hay and Buchanan, were out of the ground, based on Jefferson's earlier drawings (figures 1.3 and 1.4).[18]

With construction commencing, Jefferson needed to act quickly to refine and complete his designs. To assist with the preparation of drawings and a model, he recruited French architect Charles-Louis Clérisseau, a skilled draftsman and archaeologist. Jefferson had reviewed drawings of the perfectly preserved Maison Carrée in books and greatly admired Clérisseau's publication *Antiquités de la France, Première Parti: Monumens de Nîmes* (1778), which he eventually purchased from Clérisseau while in Paris.[19] Clérisseau's meticulous orthographic documentation of the temple's details, proportions, and layout suited Jefferson, who

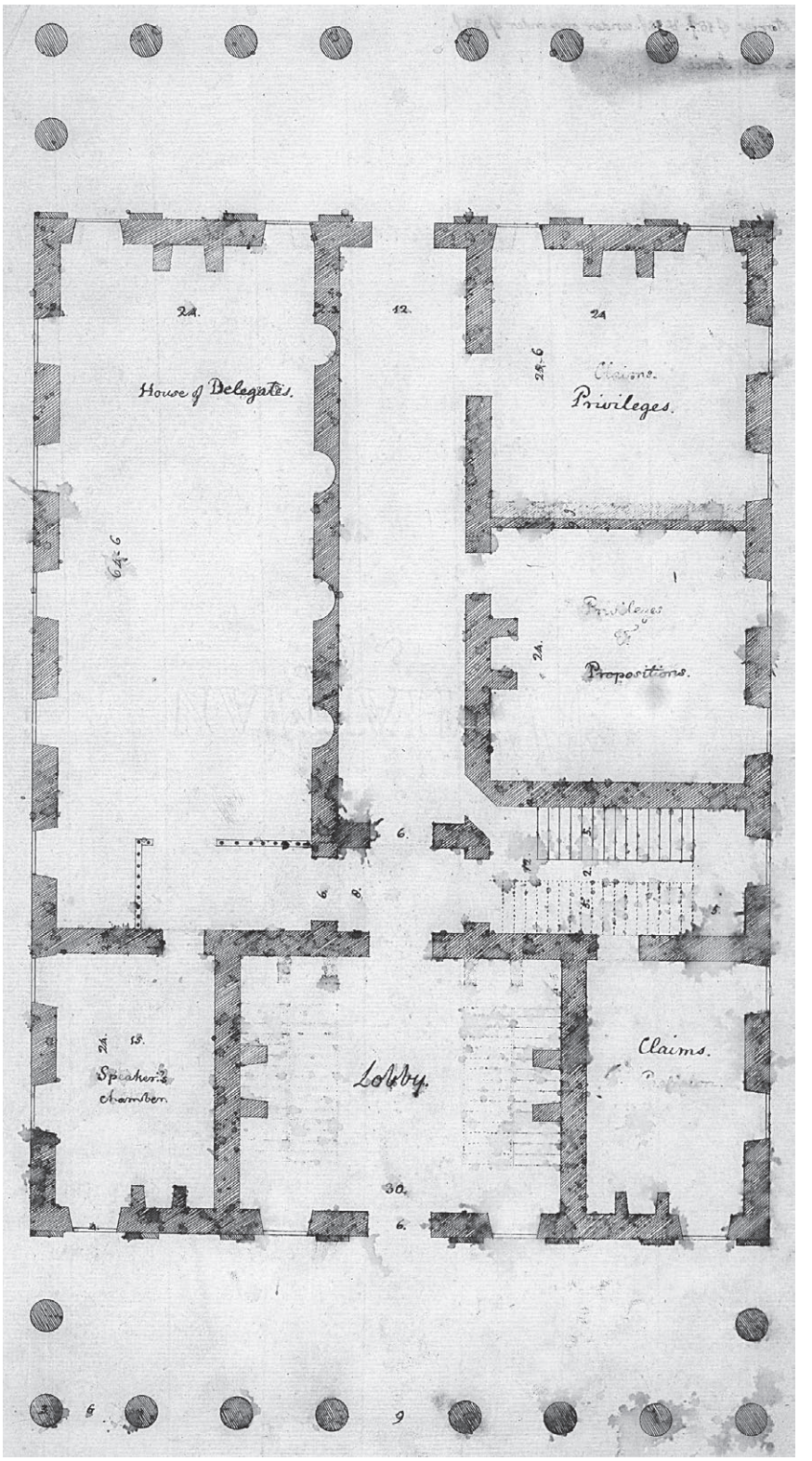

Fig. 1.3 Thomas Jefferson, first floor of the Virginia State Capitol, 1780. Ink on paper. CSmH9372, courtesy of Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

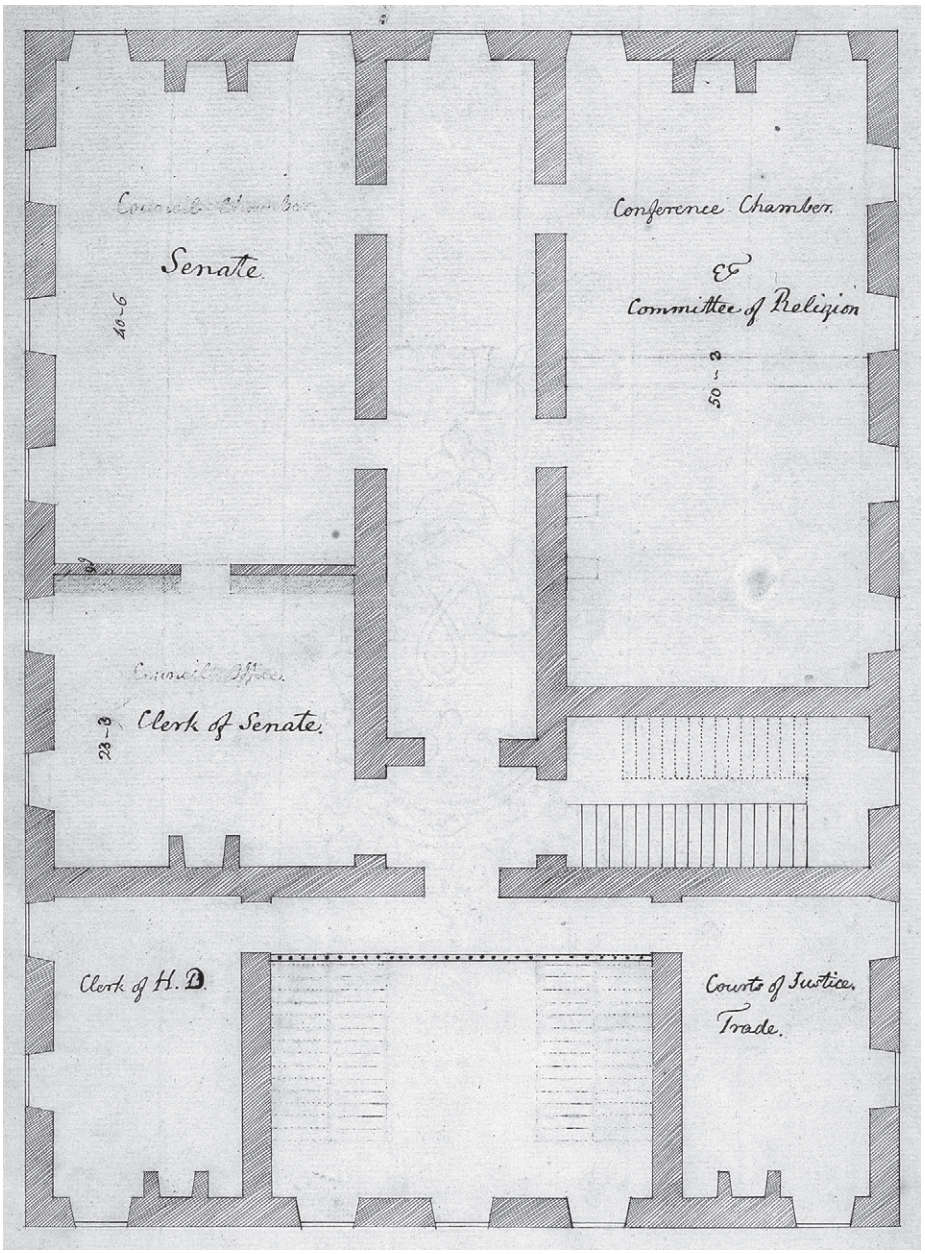

Fig. 1.4 Thomas Jefferson, second floor of the Virginia State Capitol, 1780. Ink on paper. CSmH9372, courtesy of Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

possessed not only the eye of an architect, but also the fastidious gaze of a naturalist.

Because the legislators desired to conduct all of the state's business in one structure, Jefferson with Clérisseau revised the earlier plans and placed the General Court on the first floor, across from the state's lower chamber, the House of Delegates. At the center of the elegantly proportioned two-story atrium that con-

nected the two chambers with other functions in the building, Virginians planned to erect a statue to General George Washington, a former member of the House of Burgesses; the statue would aesthetically enhance and elevate the environment for civil debate.[20] The second floor housed the senate chambers and auxiliary spaces for clerks. The new design took advantage of the basilica form, so that the protocols of assembly, deliberation, and adjudication, adapted from the colonial government, would operate smoothly in the space.

In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson expressed his desire that Virginia's new capitol building would become a model of architecture worth emulating throughout the new nation: "How is a taste in this beautiful art to be formed in our countrymen, unless we avail ourselves of every occasion when public buildings are to be erected, of presenting to them models for their study and imitation?"[21] Jefferson apprised his friend that for many people the Maison Carrée was "one of the most beautiful, if not the most beautiful and precious morsel of architecture left us by antiquity."[22] The monuments of antiquity offered Americans perfectly preserved examples of Greco-Roman classicism, an architecture emblematic of truth, justice, and democracy, one that for Jefferson had not been corrupted by capricious flourishes of the late baroque's rococo period that suited the tastes of the French aristocracy. He commissioned model maker Jean-Pierre Fouquet to complete a plaster maquette of the design. In June 1786, he shipped the model along with Clérisseau's drawings to Hay and Buchanan in Richmond.[23]

The didactic purpose of this novel design for the capitol building, Jefferson wrote to Madison, was heuristic: "Its object is to improve the taste of my countrymen, to increase their reputation, to reconcile to them the respect of the world and procure them it's [*sic*] praise."[24] In return for erecting a beautiful work of civic architecture, Americans would gain the regard of the world, which for Jefferson meant the new nation would win the admiration of Europeans. The rationale for replicating historical buildings held in high regard was that the design for such buildings was "very simple, but it is noble beyond expression, and would have done honour to our country as presenting to travellers a morsel of taste in our infancy promising much for our maturer age."[25] What Jefferson feared most was the prospect of erecting a tasteless "monument to our Barbarism."[26] Jefferson hoped that the new capitol building would be a transformative exercise that would seed a new culture and society in the New World, yielding a ripe American civilization. His proposed designs for the Virginia State Capitol would offer an invaluable public primer on how architecture could represent the virtues of durability, utility, and beauty (figure 1.5).

One challenge faced by Virginians—and the new union of thirteen states—was how to cultivate the character of its new political subjects, "the people." In eighteenth-century Europe and its colonies, refined taste in art, dress, architecture,

Fig. 1.5 Front view of Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, Virginia, 1865. Courtesy of Library of Congress, LC-DIG-cwpb-02891.

and food (fueled by the growing appetite for sugar, coffee, and tobacco) became a marker of elevated intellectual and economic status. But this "culture of taste," writes Simon Gikandi, also harbored "repressive tendencies—namely, the attempt to use *culture* to conceal the intimate connection between modern subjectivity and the political economy of slavery."[27] This interdependence between the formation of a new white American culture, one that included the arts of building, and the enslavement of African peoples, justified by their presumed innate mental and physical inferiority, can be found in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which Jefferson wrote in the same period in which he conceived the designs for Virginia's capitol building.

The State of Virginia

An esteemed member of the American Philosophical Society and deeply invested in the philosophical tenets and methods of the period, Jefferson took great interest in scientific principles drawn from the careful observation of facts and by the meticulous study of things and phenomena. His command of natural history and natural philosophy birthed *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson's only published book. He printed a private edition in 1785 that he gave to friends. A public edition was printed in London two years later.

Notes on the State of Virginia originated as a report prepared in response to twenty-three queries sent to Jefferson in 1780 by a French diplomat, François Barbé-Marbois, who had created the survey to gain a better understanding of the geographic and historic character of the newly formed United States. In *Notes on the State of Virginia* Jefferson took stock of the state's natural features and human inhabitants. In the first part, his taxonomic assessment of plants, animals, minerals, climate, rivers, mountains, and caves highlighted the state's bountiful resources. He noted that natural laws also governed the human species residing within the state's boundaries and divided them into the racial taxonomies of Europeans, Aboriginals, and Africans. The book also reviewed the state's systems and institutions that organized its society, namely its commerce, manufacturing, government, religion, and civil society. Intimately familiar with Virginia's constitution, Jefferson outlined the government's branches and duties, noting in detail the rights and laws that adjudicated the legal status and relationships, albeit unequally, between the aforementioned races.

Jefferson divided *Notes on the State of Virginia* into sections according to Barbé-Marbois's original queries in order to incrementally introduce his reader to the varied geography, species, and political sphere of Virginia. Throughout the book, Jefferson's sketch of New World ecology emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between soil, climate, and speciation. What he labeled as "nutritive juices" sustained the life force of various species, including humans.[28] Naturalists in this period were keen on observing the forces that affected how species of plants and animals developed over time. Jefferson noted in his answer to Query 6, for example, that "the difference of increment" in the minerals, flora, fauna, and species depended "on circumstances unsearchable to beings with our capacities." "Every race of animals," he added, "seems to have received from their Maker certain laws of extension at the time of their formation."[29] For many natural historians in Jefferson's era, divine forces were considered to be the regulators of the laws of nature; nature had not yet been determined to have its own laws. This logic extended to the observable differences in the physical and mental characteristics of the human species. Secular rationalism promoted a logical framework of his-

torical succession, but scientists believed these measurable innate forces were outside the control of man.

Elsewhere in his response to Query 6 Jefferson refutes at length the hypotheses of French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon, taking aim at the Frenchman's claim that "the animals common both to the old and new world, are smaller in the latter," in part due to greater heat and humidity of the Americas.[30] Through an analysis of different animal and vegetable species as they related to the climatic and geographic conditions of Virginia, Jefferson countered Buffon, showing that there had been neither a reduction of stature nor diminished diversity in any American species. This was critical for Jefferson because Buffon had also applied his theory of degeneration to humans, in particular American Indians, the "aboriginal" human in the Americas. Fearing that Buffon's assertions would suggest future degradation in Europeans who had migrated to North America, Jefferson endeavored to disprove the naturalist's claims regarding physical and mental degeneration, arguing that the species "*Homo sapiens Europaeus*" had for three centuries dwelled in the same temperate zones, nourished by the same plants and animals as the Indian of North America.[31]

One central tenet of Enlightenment natural philosophy was that in nature all races of the human species had been born equal, a view cherished by natural rights advocates such as John Locke and Charles Montesquieu, and the nation's founding patriarchs, who had formed a new nation according to principles of equality. What mattered most, however, was the difference in how far each race had advanced to become liberal subjects capable of self-governance, a state of enlightenment dependent upon innate faculties of mind and body. Thus "before we condemn the Indians of this continent as wanting genius," Jefferson countered Europeans like Buffon, "we must consider that letters have not been introduced among them." In other words, American Indians had not yet evolved to a rationalized state of civilization.[32] Regardless, almost all philosophers agreed that white Europeans were by far the superior race. They did not agree, however, on Jefferson's rationale that indigenous Americans were superior to enslaved Africans.

Jefferson advanced the logic of his observation in Query 6 by defending European colonists. He shielded them from Buffon's caustic judgments that "belittle her productions on this side of the Atlantic."[33] Jefferson provided evidence in philosophy, war, government, oratory, painting, and the plastic arts to show that "America, though but a child of yesterday, has already given hopeful proofs of genius."[34] America—its politics and culture, as Jefferson had also assessed in his letter to Madison—was still in its infancy. He was confident the United States would evolve to rival if not surpass Europe, if the minds and tastes of its white citizenry were properly nurtured, for instance, by exposure to tasteful, aesthetically pleasing architecture of the kind exemplified by the Virginia capitol building. Even

though he sought to sever ties with what he believed to be a calcifying European aristocratic culture, Jefferson nonetheless preserved its aesthetic values as a visible register of white American culture.

The transatlantic slave trade had transported another race to the Americas—*Homo Sapiens Afer*, Africans or Negroes. For Jefferson, Negroes, because of their naturally inferior faculties, could not be incorporated into the new nation state as citizens. In his response to Query 14, "The Administration of Justice and the Description of the Laws," Jefferson sought a political solution to the problem of what to do with the Negro population living in Virginia, the majority of which was enslaved. On several occasions in state legislation and in early drafts of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson had proposed language that terminated the importation of slaves into Virginia and the United States. (During his presidency he would succeed in 1808 in abolishing the international slave trade, but not its lucrative domestic market.)

Along with political concerns, Jefferson held "physical and moral objections" to Negroes based on a lifetime of observations of what he considered to be their comportment and character.[35] Because universal reason relied upon experimentation and observation for the validation of truth, Jefferson's conceptualization of the racial paradigm of human difference found one promising register in skin color. He rationalized that what counted as beautiful could be applied to the breeding of animals and therefore also to the human species—where variations in physiognomy, hair texture, and skin color were visible. Out of all these markers, skin color was the most obvious indicator of racial difference. The origins of the skin's coloration for Jefferson, however, could not be discerned by dissection of the epidermal layers or a chemical analysis of blood or bile. He determined skin color then as "fixed in nature," and therefore of divine causation. The aesthetics of blackness was part of a rationalization of the variations in the human species that divided peoples living on the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas and affirmed the superiority of Europeans and their whiteness.

Under Jefferson's probing gaze, the features of the black body were seen as less beautiful in comparison to the symmetry and flowing hair of white physiognomy. The overall lack of beauty in blackness visually and viscerally appalled Jefferson. He verified this by suggesting that even Native Americans found whites preferable, just as "the preference of the Oranootan [*sic*] [is] for the black women [*sic*] over those of his own species."[36] To posit black women as subhuman, closer to primates, was based on a theory of polygenesis in natural history, which maintained that each race was a different species. This degrading concept had circulated ten years earlier in Edward Long's epic *History of Jamaica.* As Fred Moten writes, "The pathologization of blacks and blackness in the discourse of human and natural sciences and in the corollary emergence of expertise [serves] as the defining

epistemological register of the modern subject."[37] Blackness signified the Negro's sub-humanity and validated her ruthless exploitation.

The Negroes' supposed inability to appreciate beauty, except in the most sensual manner, or to create works of true aesthetic value, except out of mimicry, also provided Jefferson with additional evidence of their natural mental inferiority. In Query 14 Jefferson surmised that in their ability to remember, blacks were equal to whites, but in their ability to reason and to comprehend mathematics and sciences, they were certainly inferior. "In their imagination," he wrote, blacks were "dull, tasteless, and anomalous."[38] To affirm the truth of his observations, Jefferson offered the examples of composer/writer Ignatius Sancho and poet Phillis Wheatley.

Jefferson held nothing but contempt for Ignatius Sancho, whose "letters do more to honour the heart than the head."[39] Sancho was born on a slave ship en route to the Caribbean and at age two migrated to England with his master. There he cleverly escaped enslavement by entering into domestic service in the households of several aristocratic families. Self-educated, he advocated for the abolition of slavery in a series of letters exchanged with a highly regarded abolitionist that brought him praise. Sancho leveraged his fame to become a well-known actor, playwright, and composer and an acquaintance to many of Europe's political and aristocratic elites. A celebrity in his right, Sancho sat for a portrait by the great painter Thomas Gainsborough. But in Query 14, Jefferson ranked Sancho, who was the first black person to vote in a British election, at the bottom in comparison to contemporary white men of letters. Jefferson suggested that if Sancho's works had any merit at all it was most likely attributable to a white collaborator rather than Sancho's own genius.

In Jefferson's mind, poet Phillis Wheatley possessed the inferior traits of both her race and gender. Wheatley was enslaved to a Boston family at age eight. Her owners named her Phillis, after the slave ship that had transported her from Senegambia to the port of Boston. Yet despite her appalling plight as an enslaved servant, she like Sancho learned to read and write at a young age. She was well read in ancient history and, inspired by the verses of Homer and John Milton, began to write poetry, publishing a collection in 1773 (figure 1.6). One of the few eighteenth-century American women to have been published, Wheatley used her public stature to advocate for American independence and for the natural rights of slaves. She was eventually freed by her owners after her first and only volume was published. Despite Wheatley's remarkable achievements under the harshest of circumstances, Jefferson believed her incapable of writing poetry, since love for the Negro could only stimulate the senses but not the imagination. He wrote that her poems were "below the dignity of criticism."[40]

Fig. 1.6 Engraving after Scipio Moorhead. Frontispiece, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, by Phillis Wheatley (London: A. Bell, 1773). Courtesy of Library of Congress, LC-DIG-ppmsca-02947.

"Deep Rooted Prejudices," "Ten Thousand Recollections"

Did the Negro, whether enslaved or freed, have a place in America? Jefferson put forward an emancipation scheme in his response to Query 14. He proposed that enslaved children "should continue with their parents to a certain age, then be brought up, at the public expence [*sic*], to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their geniusses [*sic*]."[41] Once adults, women age eighteen and men age twenty-three should be colonized to African, Caribbean, or western U.S. territories and sup-

ported until they grew in strength.[42] To replace the now-absent labor Jefferson proposed to send "vessels at the same time to other parts of the world for an equal number of white inhabitants."[43] The arrival of European immigrants would realize Jefferson's vision of a nation composed of white freeholders whose homesteads would expand the nation's boundaries westward.

Pragmatically, Jefferson believed that Virginia's history of chattel slavery would prevent black and white races from living together peacefully in the same place, citing those "deep rooted prejudices entertained by whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they sustained."[44] Emancipation and citizenship for freed blacks could only result in "convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race."[45] American civilization, therefore, could not thrive with a free black population. The undesirability of blackness, the "unfortunate difference of color, and perhaps faculty, is a powerful obstacle to emancipation of their people," argued Jefferson.[46]

Once enslaved blacks were freed, Jefferson required them to be "removed beyond the reach of mixture."[47] Thus not only did revenge by blacks pose a threat to the new nation in Jefferson's eyes, but he also feared miscegenation.[48] These sentiments on the abolition of slavery and the slave trade, as well as on the resettlement of freed Africans, were beginning to circulate widely, including among some abolitionist circles. Colonization societies were established on both sides of the Atlantic, eventually leading to the founding of Sierra Leone (1808) and Liberia (1822). The conservation of whiteness—symbolically and biologically—was paramount to the formation the United States' cultural identity.

While emancipation might have been desirable for political and moral reasons, the economic realities of how chattel slavery fueled the wealth and maintained the well-being of white Americans made it difficult to terminate an already two-century-long reliance on slave labor. The enlightened white men who "liberated" the nation espoused the humanistic values of natural rights, Lockean "life and liberty," yet many were unwilling to part with their human property. Some of Jefferson's generation did manumit their slaves either during their lifetime or upon death, as did George Washington and his heirs. However, Jefferson, who owned up to two hundred slaves at one time, more than six hundred over his lifetime, freed only seven slaves—two during his lifetime and five upon his death.[49]

In later editions of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson records that by 1792 there was almost an equal number of enslaved blacks and free whites living in Virginia. The population of free blacks had grown substantially as slaveholders liberated slaves after the Revolutionary War. But those manumissions began to taper off as the value of slaves increased. The domestic slave trade began prospering as new states and territories opened up to the west due to demand for vast swathes of land for large plantation operations. Slave labor was indispensable for cultivat-

ing crops like wheat and cotton, which were becoming more popular as tobacco farming had exhausted the soil in the mid-Atlantic. Slave owners profited from hiring out enslaved blacks to other plantations or as unskilled and skilled workers in towns and cities. Places like Alexandria and Richmond, where the capitol was under construction, teemed with enslaved and free black artisans and laborers.[50]

In 1785, Jefferson wrote from Paris to Hay and Buchanan that given the scarcity of talented craftsmen in Virginia it might be wise to hire European craftsmen well versed in wood-, stone-, and plaster-construction techniques. Securing the services of a skillful stonecutter, for example, was desirable, because, according to Jefferson, "under his [the stonecutter's] direction, negroes who never saw a tool, will be able to prepare the work for him to finish."[51]

Once construction of the capitol building was under way, enslaved laborers joined the teams of workers that cleared the land, dug foundations, hauled wood, cut lumber, molded and fired bricks, transported stone, painted walls and trim, and removed the waste from Shockoe Hill. While members of Virginia's planter class like Jefferson possessed hundreds of slaves to work their agricultural holdings and small-scale industries such as nail manufacturing, it was also common for free white Virginians engaged in business and trade, including construction, to possess a small number of enslaved Africans. William Hay, the director of public buildings in Richmond, for example, owned six slaves over the age of sixteen (tax records only make note of those who were taxable, so there could have been others under age twelve).[52] Samuel Dobie, a skilled Richmond builder who executed Jefferson's neoclassical designs, though not always faithfully to the statesman's intent, owned two adult slaves during the time of construction.[53]

Many of the tradesmen—plasterers, plumbers, and painters—who worked on the Virginia capitol owned several slaves. Edward Voss of Culpeper, a subcontractor and the supplier of the four hundred thousand bricks for the building's foundations, owned seven slaves. In October 1788 Voss sent an invoice to the directors to pay Robert Goode "the sum of ten pounds 20 shillings for the hire of Negroes to oblige."[54] To perform numerous rough carpentry and woodworking tasks for several years through 1795, Dobie subcontracted Dabney Minor, who lived on a farm in Woodlawn, in nearby Orange, Virginia, where he owned seven slaves; Minor kept ten slaves in Richmond.[55] Minor's arrangement exemplifies the connection between rural regions where raw materials were cultivated and towns where commodities and goods, including slaves, circulated in and out of markets. During the busy year of 1789, Minor's workers erected the interior framing of the courtroom and doorways, laid tongue-and-groove flooring in the courtroom, mounted scaffolding for workers to install pediments and cornices, moved bricks, and cut the wooden templates Voss used to erect the exterior columns—all part of a long list of tasks for which Minor was paid £154 (in 1788 Minor earned £1,004

for work on the site).[56] An advertisement Minor placed in Richmond and Hanover newspapers in 1794 explained that runaway slave Lewis or Lewy had been "employed at the whip-saw, and in rough plaining [*sic*]," which shows how Minor deployed enslaved workers in the various facets of his construction business.[57]

Because Richmond was a port town, freed black men also worked on the capitol building. A laborer named Fortune, who was known to Hay and Dobie, worked on the construction site for several months in 1788. His tasks included clearing away timber, planks, and rubbish from the yard. Fortune was paid directly, indicating that he might be either a freedman or an enslaved laborer who had some modicum of control over his time.[58] It is unclear from records whether enslaved Africans were rented for long periods of time and hence lived onsite. But given that Richmond was already a busy port town, the enslaved population, including women and children, provided a range of services from cooking to laundering to stabling. Enslaved blacks provided a significant portion of the labor necessary to erect Jefferson's monument to American civic life.

"Immovable Veil of Black"

The second of Latrobe's watercolors of the Virginia State Capitol, whose perspective is taken from across the James River, depicts the civic temple dominating the rustic landscape, much in the way that Jefferson's Monticello and the University of Virginia, which he also designed, commanded their respective sites. In these two other designs, the high ground, both natural and man-made, provided Jefferson the opportunity to architecturally reconcile the paradox between freedom and slavery by placing some of the slave dependencies beneath the main living spaces in rooms and passages hidden from view. This way, the white-columned neoclassical buildings appeared to visitors as idyllic beacons of democratic values overlooking sublime nature unsullied by the presence of those spaces in which unsightly slaves toiled to make the land fertile and the lives of white citizens comfortable.

Blackness was a sublime "eternal monotony," an "immovable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race," wrote Jefferson in his response to Query 14.[59] Black bodies and blackness for Jefferson and for others of his era proved an impenetrable threshold to reason. They were distasteful. Wielding the tools of enlightenment, Jefferson rationalized the Negro belonged at the back end of the social and political forces that would advance American civilization, in the same manner he designed their spaces of interminable servitude to occur below ground. While all men were born equal, as natural rights proponents advocated, to Jefferson, the Negro possessed neither the aptitude to reason nor faculties to appreciate beauty or liberty. "The people" did not include Negroes. The prospect of a free black American was both unreasonable and unimaginable to the sage of Monticello.